This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

**Usage guidelines**

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

**About Google Book Search**

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

3 3433 06823582 3

The
Gordon Lester Ford
Collection
Presented by his Sons
Worthington Chauncey Ford
and
Paul Leicester Ford
to the
New York Public Library

(Hollis)
ZE

"Mr. Holly gave me his Apology, in the
ear 1809, & in the summer of 1812, he sent
is other works. Mr. Holly leads a stri
s & blameless life at High Wycombe, Bu
there I sometimes visit him. He is, confess
n unbeliever, but he never writes profane
e is charitable & respectful in his judgmen
on the character of Christians; he devotes
is time & his fortune to doing good; an
e his errors what they may, I am bou
the principles & spirit of Christianity,
ove & to honour such a moral agent
Mr. Hollis."

Dr Parr, L. 57

Bibliotheca Parriana

THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY.
ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS.

1477
Rome

AN

# APOLOGY

FOR THE

DISBELIEF

OF

# *REVEALED RELIGION:*

Conſiſting of

TWO TRACTS REPRINTED;

THE LATTER WITH SOME ADDITIONS.

*By JOHN HOLLIS, Eſq.*

"I look upon the *right of private judgment* in every con-
"cern reſpecting God and ourſelves, as *ſuperior to the*
"*troul of human authority*; and have ever regarded *free diſ-*
"*quiſition* as the *beſt mean of illuſtrating the doctrine, and eſta-*
"*biſhing the truth of Chriſtianity.*"

BISHOP OF LLANDAFF.

*LONDON:*

PRINTED IN THE YEAR 1801.

335/1902

THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY
145724
ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS
1900.

T. Bensley, Printer, Bolt Court, Fleet Street.

# PREFACE

*To the Second Edition.*

BEING diſſatisfied with the manner in which the two following pieces were originally printed, I have determined to reprint them, and, at the ſame time, to avail myſelf of the opportunity of preſenting the reader with ſome additional matter, in confirmation of my argument. I have determined, I ſay, to *reprint*, but not to *republiſh* them. The ſecond, indeed, of theſe pieces *never was publiſhed*, though the contrary is aſſerted in the Retroſpect of Domeſtic Literature, which appears in the ninth volume of the Monthly Magazine.

What relates to me, I ſhall tranſcribe, and then ſhall take the liberty of commenting upon it.

"Mr. Hollis (ſays the retroſpector) has publiſhed An Apology for "the Diſbelief of Revealed Religion. "If any apology be neceſſary for a "diſbelief of revealed religion, as "this reſpectable infidel conceives it "is, it ſhould be made to the throne "of heaven: we acknowledge the "juriſdiction of no earthly tribunal "in matters of religion. Belief is "an act not of volition, but of ne"ceſſity. Whether the *publication* "of a man's reaſons for diſbelief *re"quires an apology*, is a different "queſtion; at any rate, we ſee not "the uſe of ſuch a pamphlet as the "*preſent*, which has little novelty "*of argument*."

This

This critic, it ſhould ſeem, takes it for granted, that an Apology implies the acknowledgment of ſomething *wrong*, and, conſequently, *blameable*. Did he then never read, or, if he has not read, did he never hear of, certain apologies of early chriſtians for their religion? But if he has neither read nor heard of ſuch ancient writings, he has certainly heard of, and poſſibly he may have read, a very recent Apology for the Bible, by a right reverend biſhop. Now does this critic imagine either that the chriſtians alluded to, meant to acknowledge how blameable they were in making profeſſion of a bad religion, or that the biſhop intended to confeſs the wickedneſs of the book for which he has thought fit to publiſh his celebrated Apology? How-

ever well informed this critic might be, it appears, he had yet to learn, that the term apology (whatever it ſignifies in vulgar ſpeech) is uſed ſynonymouſly with the term, *defence*.

But this ſagacious critic, adopting the vulgar ſenſe of the term, intimates that it may be very proper to offer an apology to the throne of heaven for *diſbelief*, while, at the ſame time, he argues, that there can be nothing *wrong* in a man's belief, becauſe it is not an act of *volition* *. So, it ſhould ſeem, according to him,

* He ſhould have ſaid a *voluntary act*. Every ſuch act has a volition preceding it, but is *not itſelf* volition. They differ, as *cauſe* and *effect*. Properly ſpeaking, there is no ſuch thing as an *act* of volition. Volition is a *ſtate of mind* from which the acts naturally flow which we term voluntary.

that

that though a man, with reſpect to ſome certain article of his conduct, may be conſcious of no wrong, it may be very proper for him, nevertheleſs, to confeſs his guilt reſpecting that very article, before the throne of heaven.

This critic aſſerts, that in my pamphlet there is little *novelty* of argument. Now, with all juſt deference to his great reading, I am ſtill diſpoſed to imagine, that although others have pointed out numerous immoralities contained in the holy books, yet the inſtances which I inſiſted upon are, at leaſt ſome of them, new. Generally ſpeaking, the diſcourſes of the founder of chriſtianity have been ſuppoſed to exhibit nothing but the pureſt and moſt

perfect morality. Whether they are *all* worthy of such an eulogy, I would request any serious and intelligent man to decide, after he has read my strictures upon two distinguished parables: which remarks I believe to be *absolutely new*; and if well-founded (as I am satisfied they are), they are of great moment.

I do not pretend that the argument is new, by which I have attempted to shew, and have, I think, shewn, that if we admit the doctrine taught both by the disciples of Christ and by Christ himself concerning the Supreme Existence, we must admit the Supreme to be (however horrible the idea) not a *good* Being, but the very *reverse*. To this argument, however, I am particularly desirous

of

of engaging the attention of liberal chriſtians: becauſe they have oppoſed a ſimilar one to the doctrine of Calvin. Mine is oppoſed to that of Chriſt; who, though a perſonage juſtly revered for the purity of his intentions and the ardour of his benevolence, ſeems, relative to the grand ſubject of DEITY, not to have comprehended the full import of what he himſelf taught.

The following argument is, I believe, a new one. I have argued that the pretenſions of chriſtianity to a heavenly and miraculous origin can have no juſt foundation, becauſe it has *failed* in reſpect of its object. Its object is allowed to have been the reformation of the world. Now *the world has not been reformed.*

Moreover,

Moreover, whereas ſome of the ableſt champions of chriſtianity, are the ſtrenuous advocates of free inquiry, and have even given us to underſtand that the ſpirit of the chriſtian religion is a liberal ſpirit, and friendly to philoſophical inveſtigation; I, on the contrary, have advanced ſomewhat which I think is new, in order to ſhew that the ſpirit of this religion is a *ſlaviſh ſpirit*, and *hoſtile to intellectual improvement*.

But what is the ſpirit of our notable critic? He, like ſome other men, has the goodneſs to permit us to *think* for ourſelves. Nevertheleſs, he inſinuates that, at leaſt, it is queſtionable whether a man ſhould be left at liberty to *publiſh* his thoughts. And yet he, like other conſiſtent

people, is, I dare ſay, for a *free preſs*; and moſt probably would not heſitate to concede—That the proper mean of eliciting truth is *free diſcuſſion*.

As my Apology was neither advertiſed nor ſold, and only diſtributed among friends and acquaintance, I did not expect that any periodical critic would honour it with his notice. If, however, the *authoriſed* Reviewer in the Monthly Magazine ſhould beſtow any attention upon it; in that caſe, it ſeemed to me impoſſible that I ſhould meet with any other than the moſt liberal treatment. How much liberality is exhibited in the paſſage above cited let the reader judge; and, if this preface ſhould come into the

hands

hands of the editor of that valuable miſcellany, let him determine how much honour is reflected upon it by ſuch criticiſm.

---

Since the above was written, the New Annual Regiſter for 1799 has been brought to me; and I there find it aſſerted, in the Review of Domeſtic Literature, that I have *publiſhed* an Apology, &c.

The Reviewer expreſſes his ſurpriſe that I ſhould, "even by implication, adduce the exiſtence of the "African Slave Trade as an argument againſt chriſtianity, becauſe "it is an evil that has obtained only "ſince

"ſince that religion has become "known. Might he not (adds the "Reviewer) with equal juſtice allege "againſt it every other civil and "moral outrage on the rights and "feelings of mankind which has "originated in what is called the "chriſtian world ſince the reign of "the emperor Conſtantine? Might "he not, with equal fairneſs and "weight in point of argument, *aſ-* "*cribe* to it that diſeaſe which many "writers contend the chriſtian na- "vigator Columbus imported from "America?"

From hence the reader is naturally led to conceive that I have repreſented the African ſlave trade as having originated from the chriſtian religion. I have done no ſuch thing.

But

But I have reaſoned after this manner:—If the object of the Supreme Being, in ſending the chriſtian religion into the world, was the *reformation* of mankind, *i. e.* their *recovery to virtue and happineſs*, the grievous and manifold evils exiſting in the world, ſince the chriſtian æra, and that horrid enormity, the African ſlave trade, particularly, which, ſince that æra, has ſprung up *in ſpite of the influence* of chriſtianity, prove that the object of it has not been attained. Chriſtianity, it has been ſaid, was intended as a remedy to *cure* the "civil and moral outrages, &c." which have ſo dreadfully prevailed: but theſe evils *have not been cured.* On the contrary, *peculiar evils*, of the worſt deſcription, have ariſen out of *this very remedy.* Now rather than

believe

believe that the Supreme Being has been thus cruelly *diſappointed* in reſpect of his object, I am diſpoſed to believe that he never had any ſuch object.

The Reviewer, I dare ſay, will not bluſh for having thus miſrepreſented my argument. If this preface, however, ſhould happen to fall in his way, I beg leave to aſſure him that, if I had undertaken to *animadvert publicly* on any production of his, or any other man's, and had done it after his [the reviewer's] faſhion, it would not, I think, be poſſible for me *to eſcape my own reproaches.*

SOBER AND SERIOUS

# *REASONS for SCEPTICISM,*

AS IT CONCERNS

# REVEALED RELIGION.

IN A LETTER TO A FRIEND.

———" Of good and evil much,
" And much of mortal man my thought revolv'd."

AKENSIDE.

# ADVERTISEMENT,

*Printed with the firſt Edition.*

---

It is well known, there is a deſcription of men who have ſufficient liberality to permit one to think freely on all ſubjects: but by them it is not permitted on all ſubjects to expreſs, or, however, to *publiſh*, one's thoughts: and, I am afraid, ſome of my friends, for whom I have a great regard, belong to that claſs. It is their opinion, that *moſt* things ſhould be brought before the public, in order to their being properly eſtimated: I think ſo of *all* things, of importance, in which the public is concerned.

DEAR SIR,

You will allow me, I am ſure, the privilege of a friend, to communicate to you a matter which greatly concerns me; and I flatter myſelf that you will feel intereſted on the occaſion. I will, therefore, without further preface, acquaint you that a very important alteration has taken place in my ſentiments, and lay before you the conſiderations whereby this has been brought about.

During a courſe of years, my mind has been more or leſs affected by doubts reſpecting Revelation; yet they ſeemed to be overborne by the arguments which I was able to produce in favour of it; ſo that I

conceived myſelf to be a rational believer: but, having lately been induced to inſtitute a new and ſerious inquiry, the conſequence is, I find myſelf conſtrained to become a *Sceptic.*

This is certainly what I did not wiſh for. My prejudices ſeem to have lain on the ſide of revealed religion; and (with ſuch ability as I had) I have endeavoured to ſupport it. Indeed, when ſome perſons remember me ſo zealous an advocate for that cauſe as to render my prudence queſtionable, they may poſſibly ſuſpect me of levity. In ſo doing, however, they would wrong me. That which I formerly venerated as a chriſtian, I continue ſtill to venerate. But, whereas I formerly imagined the doctrines of chriſtianity (without giving their expreſs ſanction) were in very good accord with thoſe ideas of a benevolent providence, furniſhed by my philoſophy, and I rejoiced to have my expectations of future exiſtence confirmed

confirmed by the chriſtian revelation—it now appears evident that the difference is irreconcileable between thoſe doctrines and my philoſophical ideas and proſpects. Theſe laſt are ſo happily and forcibly repreſented by Dr. Prieſtley, in his dedication of the Treatiſe on Neceſſity to the late Dr. Jebb, that I ſhall borrow what here follows. "You and I, Sir (ſays Dr. P.), "rejoice in the belief that the whole human race are under the ſame *wholeſome* "*diſcipline*, and that they will all certainly "derive the moſt valuable advantages "from it, though in different degrees, in "different ways, and at different periods; "that even the perſecutors are only giving "the precedence to the perſecuted, and "advancing them to a much higher degree of perfection and happineſs; and "that they muſt themſelves for the ſame "benevolent purpoſe undergo a more ſevere diſcipline than that which they are "the means of adminiſtering to others."

" With this perſuaſion, we cannot but " conſider every *being* and every *thing* in " a favourable light. Every perſon with " whom we have any connection is a *friend*, " and every event in life a *benefit*; while " God is equally the father and the friend " of the whole creation."

Such appeared to me to be the preſent condition, and ſuch the future deſtiny, of human kind: and ſuch they ſtill appear. I mean to ſay, that, in my opinion, this is the moſt reaſonable mode of explaining the phænomena of human nature, and human affairs. But, if the ſcriptures are to determine us, we muſt abandon, as altogether *viſionary*, our delightful ideas and joyful expectations derived from ſuch a benevolent conſtitution of things, however worthy we may deem ſuch a conſtitution tob e of Him who is the firſt, the greateſt, and the beſt of all. In reality, what is repreſented in the New Teſtament as *the future and final*

deſtination

*deſtination of mankind* forms a contraſt with it moſt melancholy and diſtreſſing.—Let us appeal to what we find there, and eſpecially to what are ſaid to be the words of Chriſt himſelf.

In the 5th chapter of Matthew, verſes 29th and 30th, the words of Jeſus Chriſt are thus recorded: "If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out and caſt it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members ſhould periſh, and not that thy whole body ſhould be caſt into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and caſt it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members ſhould periſh, and not that thy whole body ſhould be caſt into hell."

Now, in caſe we ſhould not underſtand what is meant by the phraſe *caſt into hell*, we may find the matter more fully expreſſed in the 18th chapter, and the 9th verſe, *where the* phraſe uſed is *everlaſting* fire.

He

He is likewiſe ſaid by Mark to have been ſtill more explicit on the ſame ſubject. It will anſwer my purpoſe to tranſcribe the paſſage.

"If thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it "is better for thee to enter into life maim-"ed, than, having two hands, to go into "hell, into the fire that *never ſhall be* "*quenched:* where their worm *dieth not,* "and the fire *is not quenched.* And if thy "foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better "for thee to enter halt into life, than, hav-"ing two feet, to be caſt into hell, into the "fire that *never ſhall be quenched:* where "their worm dieth not, and the fire *is not* "*quenched.* And if thine eye offend thee, "pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter "the kingdom of God with one eye, than, "having two eyes, to be caſt into hell-fire: "where their worm *dieth not,* and the *fire* "*is not quenched.* For every one ſhall be "*ſalted with fire* *."

* Mark, chap. ix.

From

From the account which Luke gives us, it appears, that when one inquired of Chriſt, Whether there were *few* to be ſaved? he declined giving a direct anſwer, by ſaying, "Strive to enter in at the ſtrait gate: "for *many*, I ſay unto you, will ſeek to "enter in, and ſhall not be able." Nevertheleſs, we learn from Matthew, that he taught thus: "Enter ye in at the ſtrait "gate; for wide is the gate and broad is "the way that leadeth to *deſtruction*, and "*many* there be which go in thereat: be-"cauſe ſtrait is the gate and narrow is "the way which leadeth unto life, and *few* "there be that find it." Let us now turn to that remarkable prayer of Chriſt, which we find in the 17th chapter of John, and in which are the following expreſſions: "The men which thou gaveſt me *out of* "*the world*—I pray for *them:* I pray *not* "for *the world.*" Agreeably to this diſtinction, John ſays, near the concluſion of his firſt epiſtle, "We know that *we* are of "God,

ſons, ſeeing the very happy and deſirable conſequences reſulting from that doctrine in conjunction with the belief of a perfect Deity, becauſe they *wiſhed* it, ſeem to have perſuaded themſelves that they have actually *found* their philoſophical doctrine in the books of ſcripture. Or elſe, perhaps, they have conceived that, by applying the philoſophical theory, they can ſolve difficulties, which occur in thoſe books, not ſolvable by any other proceſs. The misfortune is, *the theory will not apply.*

The ſcriptural doctrines of the divine fore-knowledge, and of a ſcheme of providence, which, while comprehending the general affairs of the world, is repreſented as extending likewiſe to the concerns of each individual, *coincide* very well with the philoſophical doctrine of neceſſity. But nothing can be more *repugnant* to it than what the ſcriptures teach us concerning *puniſhments*, eſpecially *never-ending puniſh-*

*ments*, and the *demerits* of all mankind (except the *few* who enter in at the ſtrait gate), which, according to the ſcriptures, render thoſe puniſhments proper, and, as it ſhould ſeem, even neceſſary, to be inflicted on them by a juſt and righteous God.

It ſeems natural enough for a benevolent neceſſarian to conſider thoſe paſſages of ſcripture, where the benevolence of the Deity is mentioned, as perfectly conſonant with his philoſophy. They are ſo in reality. But this will never ſhew that the happy *reſults* of his philoſophy have *the ſcriptural ſanction*. On the other hand, thoſe explicit declarations of Chriſt, relative to future puniſhment, together with the other paſſages equally explicit, above cited, are totally adverſe and irreconcileable. And, in my apprehenſion, they are no more capable of being reconciled to that character of benevolence which *every chriſtian*, whether a neceſſarian or no, aſcribes to God.

There

There is ſcarcely any chriſtian who would deny the *foreknowledge* of God, although he ſhould believe the *free will* of man. But, ſhould he, at the ſame time, believe alſo the doctrine of *eternal puniſhment*, it would not be poſſible for him to withhold his aſſent to the following propoſition: That the Creator, when he gave exiſtence to human beings, endowed them with a power whereby, he *certainly knew*, they would make themſelves *eternally miſerable*. Indeed the ſcriptural account of the *final deſtination* of the human race appears to me *ſhocking*, (as I ſhould think it would to any conſiderate man), not only when contemplated as it is ſimply in itſelf, but becauſe it impreſſes on the mind ſuch an idea of the conduct of Almighty God as goes to the annihilation of his moral attributes.

All thoſe who, holding man to be a free agent, a ſelf-determined being, think that his ſins *require* puniſhment to follow them,

and that they ought not *in juſtice* to go *unpuniſhed*, do nevertheleſs, I preſume, judge that the *puniſhment* ought to be *proportionate* to the *offence*.

Others, again, who deſcribe human nature in the ſame way, think that, where the power and wiſdom of Government are adequate to the purpoſe, *all* puniſhment ought to be ſo applied as that, while it operates for an *example*, it ſhould *reform* the offender.

But, as for me, who am thoroughly convinced that, agreeably to the philoſophical doctrine of neceſſity, every man is what he is, *inevitably*, in conſequence of that ſituation and thoſe circumſtances which have been aſſigned him by his Maker,—how can I reflect, without *horror*, on what has been adduced from the chriſtian ſcriptures relative to the future and final condition of mankind, if I preſerve the leaſt veneration

for that which is indeed infinitely venerable—the *character of Deity?*

Every man (in what way ſoever he came by them) is poſſeſſed of the ideas of *juſtice* and *benevolence.* He eſteems his fellow man who is juſt and benevolent to be a good character; and he cannot help ſo doing. And if he could believe in a God who was not juſt and benevolent, he could not eſteem ſuch a being to be a good character if he would. If he is upright, he judges of thoſe around him by the apoſtolical maxim, "He that doeth righteouſneſs is righteous." And any juſt idea he can form of his Maker's moral character muſt be formed in the ſame way. Let any perſon, then, ſuppoſe the ſcriptural account of the final deſtination of mankind to be ſuch as I think I have ſhewn it to be. In that caſe he muſt either admit the account to be falſe, or he muſt own, I apprehend, that the ſcriptural Deity is not a

juſt

juſt and benevolent being. For my part, I am perſuaded that it is the true ſcriptural account; but I am, at leaſt, equally perſuaded, for I am well convinced, that it is *in itſelf falſe*. This, dear Sir, is my grand objection to chriſtianity, and the principal ground of my ſcepticiſm: I have therefore naturally mentioned it firſt. My mind, however, is much impreſſed by the hiſtory of *the extermination of the Canaanites:* and, moreover, I cannot help thinking, that the very notion of Miracles and Revelation is attended with much difficulty.

I am ſenſible that theſe my two remaining objections, of which I am about to ſpeak, are far from being new: but the queſtion is,—Have they ever received a ſatisfactory reply? The firſt of them, I think, certainly has not: eſpecially ſince I have had the pleaſure of reading the letters addreſſed to Thomas Paine by the learned and ingenious Biſhop of Landaff. His

" deſtroyed by earthquakes, men with
" their wives, their ſons, and their little
" ones, were ſwallowed up alive:—why
" do you not ſpurn, as ſpurious, the book
" of nature, in which this fact is certainly
" written, and from the peruſal of which
" you infer the moral juſtice of God?
" You will, probably, reply, that the evils,
" which the Canaanites ſuffered from the
" expreſs command of God, were different
" from thoſe which are brought on man-
" kind by the operation of the laws of na-
" ture.—Different! in what?—Not in
" the magnitude of the evil—not in the
" ſubjects of ſufferance—not in the author
" of it—for my philoſophy, at leaſt, in-
" ſtructs me to believe that God not only
" primarily formed, but that he hath
" through all ages executed the laws of
" nature; and that he will through all eter-
" nity adminiſter them, for the general
" happineſs of his creatures, whether we
" can, on every occaſion, diſcern that end
" or not.

" I am far from being guilty of the im-
" piety of queſtioning the exiſtence of the
" moral juſtice of God, as proved either
" by natural or revealed religion; what I
" contend for is ſhortly this—that you
" have no right, in fairneſs of reaſoning,
" to urge any apparent deviation from
" moral juſtice as an argument againſt re-
" vealed religion, becauſe you do not urge
" an equally apparent deviation from it as
" an argument againſt natural religion:
" you reject the former and admit the
" latter, without adverting that they muſt
" ſtand, or fall together *."

Forbearing to make any comment on the ſtyle of the paragraphs I have quoted, I take the liberty to obſerve, that when his Lordſhip would prove there is *no* difference between the deſtruction reſulting from a *natural event* and the deſtruction *executed by the hands of the Iſraelites at the*

* See Letters to T. Paine, pages 14, 15, 16, 17, 18.

*command of God*, and when he, for that end, enumerates ſeveral circumſtances in which theſe two things *agree*, he omits one, and that an important one, in which they will be found to *differ eſſentially*. Admitting God to be the author of both, no man can truly affirm the *intention* to have been *the ſame* in both caſes, till he ſhall be intitled to affirm that Calamity and Puniſhment are *ſynonymous*. But all men conſent to *diſtinguiſh* between theſe things. That there are natural puniſhments I will not deny. When the conſcience of our third royal Richard found him out, and the horrible ſpectres, of thoſe who had fallen victims to his cruel tyranny, preſented themſelves to his imagination *, he may be ſaid to have endured, not merely a calamity, but a natural puniſhment. When the plague deſtroyed the good Howard, the philanthropiſt, at Cherſon, it was not a puniſh-

* Whether this be literally the hiſtorical truth *is of no importance* to my argument.

ment,

ment, but a ſad calamity. And it is worthy of our conſideration, that it is recorded, when a notorious calamity befel ſome Galileans, and another ſimilar matter happened to certain perſons at Jeruſalem, Chriſt put the queſtion—Think ye that theſe men were ſinners above other men? and anſwered it himſelf thus, "I tell you, *nay*." In which determination two opinions ſeem to be ſignified: firſt, that calamity is *not* puniſhment; and, ſecondly, that all juſt puniſhment implies *ſin* or *crime* in the ſubject of it. Indeed, I am perſuaded that both are perfectly agreeable to the general apprehenſions of mankind: for no one, till his ideas of *right* and *wrong* were confounded, and till he had "put *evil* for *good*, and *good* for *evil*," ever thought that the *righteous*, or the *innocent*, were the *proper ſubjects of puniſhment*.

Now what is the conduct aſcribed to God in the ſcripture hiſtory, and defended

with

with ſo much zeal by the learned prelate? It is preciſely this, that he inflicted the puniſhment of death on the *innocent infants* of the Canaanites. The extermination is repreſented as a ſignal and terrible puniſhment. But, whatever we may think of the parents, it *could not* have been deſerved by the *innocent infants*. With reſpect to theſe laſt, therefore, it *could not* be other than an *unjuſt* puniſhment.

Calamity, as ſuch, is *not* puniſhment, unleſs every calamity, great or ſmall, is ſo, whereby either men or brute animals are afflicted: Therefore, though the all-wiſe Author of nature might ſee fit that the inhabitants of Lima, Catania, and Liſbon, ſhould periſh by earthquakes, it does not follow that he inflicted puniſhment on them: Therefore thoſe caſes were *different* from the caſe of the extermination of the Canaanites.

If, however, for the ſake of argument, we ſhould grant that there was *no* difference, and that thoſe natural calamities were real puniſhment, and ſhould apologiſe for the *innocent* having been included with the *guilty* in the ſame puniſhment, by alleging the *impoſſibility* of diſtinguiſhing them without a miracle:—the ſame apology could not be made for puniſhing the Canaanitiſh Infants; becauſe it was very *eaſy* to diſtinguiſh *them*.

The Biſhop, in the next page, remarks that "He (God) made the Iſraelites the "executors of his vengeance; and in do- "ing this he gave ſuch an evident and "terrible proof of his abomination of vice, "as could not fail to ſtrike the ſurround- "ing nations with aſtoniſhment and terror, "and to impreſs on the minds of the Iſ- "raelites what they were to expect, if they "followed the example of the nations "whom he commanded them to cut off."

Now

Now I think, indeed, the minds of that people would be very ſtrongly impreſſed by being made the executors of ſuch dreadful vengeance: but I cannot help thinking, too, that the impreſſion would be very pernicious. By learning that it belonged to the character of the Governor and the Judge of the world *to inflict cruel and unjuſt puniſhment*, they would not be inſpired with veneration for that ſupreme Governor and Judge. And it is hard to perſuade one that the ſtaining their hands in the blood of infants was likely to teach them humanity. In reality, it does not appear, from their hiſtory, that they poſſeſſed much of either: and it is particularly worthy of notice, that they were not even preſerved from the very worſt crimes of the exterminated nations.

It is painful to reflect that men ſhould ever have been led to imagine, whilſt habituated to the practice of atrocious injuſtice,

tice, they might plead both the *authority* and *example* of that great Being whom they acknowledged as their maker, and, likewiſe, as their Governor and Judge. Deplorable indeed muſt have been the circumſtances of thoſe men: and it is difficult to conceive any circumſtances more naturally fitted to generate the moſt horrid ſpecies of depravity.

Such are my reaſons for thinking the Biſhop of Landaff has not ſucceeded in his attempt to refute an objection which in my mind is a very ſerious one, and likely to remain ſo.

It ſeems impoſſible to conceive how any order for extermination ſhould proceed from the juſt and benevolent Deity: but that which reſpects the Amalekites, delivered by Samuel, in the name of God, to Saul, is more extraordinary than that concerning the other nations. It is as follows:

lows: " Thus ſaith the Lord of hoſts, I " remember that which Amalek did to Iſ- " rael, how he laid wait for him in the " way when he came up from Egypt. " Now go and ſmite Amalek, and utterly " deſtroy all that they have, and ſpare " them not; but ſlay both *man* and *woman*, " *infant* and *ſuckling*, ox and ſheep, camel " and aſs*." Now it is obſervable, that this order does not make the *wickedneſs* of the Amalekites the reaſon of their deſtruction; but the charge (though not literally ſo expreſſed) ſeems to be in effect this, *That they took up arms againſt their invaders.* It may be obſerved, likewiſe, that *the generation* of men who had done this was *paſſed away:* and *all* of thoſe, for whom this horrible maſſacre was decreed, were as *innocent* of the charge as the *infants* and *ſucklings.* The hiſtory of the offence is recorded in the 17th chapter of Exodus: and at the end of that chapter we are told, " The

* 1 Sam. xv. 2, 3.

" Lord

" Lord ſaid unto Moſes, Write this for a " memorial in a book, and rehearſe it in " the ears of Joſhua; for I will *utterly put* " *out the remembrance of Amalek from under* " *heaven*. And Moſes built an altar, " and called the name of it JEHOVAH-" niſſi: for he ſaid, Becauſe the Lord hath " ſworn, *that the Lord will have war with* " *Amalek from generation to generation.*"

We need not, ſurely, to be ſurpriſed that the jewiſh people have been characteriſed by the qualities of cruelty and malice. Nevertheleſs, we find theſe qualities appearing ſometimes where one would not expect it:—we find them in their *devotions*.

It is univerſally admitted that, in the book of *Pſalms*, there are many compoſitions of unrivalled excellence in their kind. The divine providence and goodneſs are celebrated there in ſtrains of poetry admirably

rably ſublime, and powerfully affecting, which ſeem expreſſive of feelings truly devout, and adapted to call forth ſimilar feelings. There are paſſages, however, that occur in this book, at which I am aſtoniſhed; but the feeling excited has nothing *pleaſurable* belonging to it. The very writer who, at one time, praiſes God becauſe "he is gracious and full of compaſſion, "ſlow to anger and of great mercy; be- "cauſe he is good to all, and his tender "mercies are over all his works *;"—the very ſame writer, in an addreſs to that ſame God, whoſe goodneſs he has thus celebrated, uſes the following expreſſions relative to his own perſonal enemies: "Let "their table become a ſnare before them, "and that which ſhould have been for "their welfare, let it become a trap! *Let* "*their eyes be darkened that they ſee not*, and "make their loins continually to ſhake! "Pour out thine indignation upon them,

* See Pſalm cxlv.

"and

" and let thy wrathful anger take hold of " them! Let their habitation be deſolate, " and let none dwell in their tents *!" On another occaſion, we have theſe horrid imprecations of the ſame writer upon his enemy: " When he ſhall be judged, let " him be condemned, and let his prayer " become ſin! Let his days be few, and " let another take his office! *Let his chil-* " *dren be fatherleſs and his wife a widow!* " *Let his children be continually vagabonds,* " *and beg: let them ſeek their bread out of* " *their deſolate places!* Let the extortioner " catch all that he hath; and let the ſtran- " ger ſpoil his labour! *Let there be none to* " *extend mercy unto him, neither let there be* " *any to favour his fatherleſs children!* Let " his poſterity be cut off, and, in the ge- " neration following, let his name be blot- " ted out! *Let the iniquity of his father be* " *remembered with the Lord; and let not the*

* See Pſalm lxix.

" *ſin of his mother be blotted out!* Let them " be before the Lord continually, that he " may cut off the memory of them from " the earth! becauſe that he remembered " not to ſhew mercy; but perſecuted the " poor and needy man [the imprecator " himſelf], that he might even ſlay the " broken in heart. As he loved curſing, " ſo let it come unto him! As he delight- " ed not in bleſſing, ſo let it be far from " him! As he clothed himſelf with curſ- " ing as with a garment, ſo let it come " into his bowels like water, and like oil " into his bones! Let it be unto him as " the garment which covereth him, and " for a girdle wherewith he is girded con- " tinually! Let this be the reward of *my* " *adverſaries* from the Lord*!"——We have got, I preſume, a ſufficient ſpecimen of one kind of devotional ſpirit. But as the writer was a writer of celebrity with his countrymen, he muſt have found among

* See Pſalm cix.

them

them a *congenial* ſpirit. I hope and believe it was never found any where elſe.

There was one more objection, mentioned above, reſpecting the difficulty attending the very notion of Miracles and Revelation.

When I was very young, and as yet *totally ignorant* of what philoſophers have diſcovered concerning the immenſe ſyſtem of the univerſe, and the laws of the material world,—this difficulty did not at all affect me. But at preſent it ſeems to me, as it has long ſeemed, to be a thing, if not abſolutely incredible, very hard to believe, that the venerable Author of univerſal nature, after having eſtabliſhed the general order, and the laws by which all natural events are brought to paſs, ſhould find it neceſſary to *break in* upon that order and thoſe laws for the accompliſhment of his deſigns. Moreover, ſince I became a ne-

ceſſarian, the difficulty has not been diminiſhed by my conviction that the mind is ſubject to laws as certain as the laws of gravitation, and that events take place as regularly in the intellectual and moral, as in the material world.

Indeed I am not quite ſo averſe to admit ſome *grand interference* for a very extraordinary purpoſe, as to receive the account of the many particular miracles recorded in the ſcripture hiſtory.

The idea of God, in moſt men's minds, is a very different thing from that conceived by a philoſopher habituated to contemplate the univerſe. What can ſuch a contemplative man think, when he reads of perſonal viſits from the infinite and eternal Deity to the man Abraham, and the colloquial diſcourſe which paſſed on thoſe occaſions? Let any reflecting perſon read what is related, in the 20th chapter of Geneſis,

Geneſis, concerning Abraham, Sarah, and Abimelech the king of Gerar; and the account of what God is repreſented as ſpeaking, in a viſion, to Abimelech; likewiſe the account of the miraculous puniſhment inflicted on the female part of Abimelech's family; and then let him declare ſoberly how he is impreſſed by the narrative. I am no ſcoffer: but I do not wonder at Mr. Voltaire's ſcoffing. Independently, however, of the objection to this ſtory and the morality of it, can it appear at all probable that ſuch perſonal conferences ſhould have taken place between *the Author of the univerſe* and *Abraham* or *Moſes* as thoſe related? I inquire not how probable ſuch things may be in the eſtimation of ordinary men, but in that of intelligent and reflecting perſons.

There is what, I think, will illuſtrate the matter, in a volume of letters, addreſſed to various perſons, by Dr. Prieſt-

ley*. Among the reſt, there are twelve very excellent ones to the late Dr. Price; in one of which, on the antecedent probability of the Arian hypotheſis, we meet with theſe following obſervations:

" That *mere divines* ſhould talk ſo light-
" ly as they ſometimes do, concerning *crea-*
" *tion*, and the poſſibility of its falling with-
" in the province of an inferior being, I
" I do not wonder; becauſe they have no
" proper idea of what creation is or im-
" plies. They have no conception of the
" magnitude of it, or of the wonderful ex-
" tent of the laws by which the mundane
" ſyſtem is governed. But you, Sir, are
" not a mere divine. You rank high in
" the claſs of mathematicians and natural
" philoſophers, who are daily contemplat-
" ing, and making farther inquiries into,
" the laws of nature; who are filled with

* The title is, Letters to Dr. Horne, to the Young Men of Oxford and Cambridge, to Dr Price, and to Mr. Packhurſt. Publiſhed by Johnſon, 1787.

" aſtoniſhment

" aſtoniſhment at what they do ſee of them,
" and who are at the ſame time well ſatiſ-
" fied that all they ſee bears no ſenſible
" proportion to that which is unknown.

" Now that a being poſſeſſing the pro-
" found wiſdom, and aſtoniſhing power,
" that muſt have been neceſſary to the
" conſtruction of ſuch a ſyſtem as this
" (even allowing the *matter* out of which it
" was made to have been prepared for
" him), ſhould become a child in the
" womb of a woman, be born, be brought
" up from infancy to manhood, be ſubject
" to all the pains and infirmities of men,
" be delivered into the hands of his ene-
" mies, be crucified, and die, appears to
" me to be in reality no leſs incredible
" than it does to you that the creator of
" *all* worlds ſhould be thus degraded."

I do not ſay, you will obſerve, that the inſtances which the ſcripture hiſtory affords

of colloquial diſcourſe between *the Author of nature* and *Abraham*, and between the ſame *infinite and aſtoniſhing Being* and *Moſes*, are *parallel* inſtances of degradation; they, nevertheleſs, appear ſo degrading as to render the hiſtory *antecedently improbable:* and, indeed, I think that any accounts of miraculous interpoſition muſt appear ſo, even to perſons whoſe minds are ſtrongly impreſſed with religion, provided it be a rational and not a ſuperſtitious religion; and provided the perſons in queſtion be acquainted with the great laws of nature, and attentive to the events conſtantly taking place according to the eſtabliſhed order. I have certainly no pretenſions to the character of a profound philoſopher; but, beholding, every day, and ſeriouſly contemplating, as I do, the regular way in which the Author of nature brings his deſigns to paſs, to me it appears an *unnatural thing* to ſuppoſe him *deviating* from his eternal courſe.

Yet

Yet I mean to ſay no more than that ſuch miraculous interpoſition is *antecedently improbable*; I do not affirm it to be *abſolutely incredible.*

After all, I am ready to acknowledge that I feel the force of the argument, for the truth of the chriſtian revelation, derived from the *teſtimony* of the apoſtles taken together with their ſubſequent conduct, and the perſecutions which they thereby knowingly incurred. If the chriſtian miracles were not true (and if the apoſtles were, as they are ſuppoſed to have been, competent to judge of that matter), their conduct is altogether unaccountable; and the rapid ſucceſs of chriſtianity is equally ſo.

This argument has been repeatedly urged by Dr. Prieſtley, and recently by the biſhop of Landaff*; more eſpecially it has

* See his Two Sermons, and a Charge to his Clergy. Publiſhed by Evans.

been

been ſtated and enforced with great ability by Mr. Paley; whoſe work, I imagine, is conſidered as the completeſt defence of chriſtianity in the Engliſh language. This argument likewiſe ſeems, in the opinion of thoſe writers, to be the ſtrong ground on which chriſtianity ſtands. But I would inquire, Can it ſupport the truth of the chriſtian revelation, without ſanctioning the morality of the Old and New Teſtaments? Or may we receive the revelation of *a future ſtate* on the authority of this argument, and be at liberty to reject *the morality* taught in thoſe books, the whole or any part of it, if it ſhould appear to us to be falſe and pernicious morality? Theſe queſtions, I apprehend, will be *negatived* by every chriſtian.

But though I ſhould concede that, on the ſuppoſition of chriſtianity being *falſe*, both the conduct of the apoſtles and the rapid ſucceſs of chriſtianity are *unaccount-*

able:

*able:* What then? In the preſent caſe, as in many others, I muſt acquieſce in my ignorance and inability. At the ſame time I may be allowed to aſſert, That no argument can prove that to be true which in itſelf is impoſſible. Now I am convinced it is impoſſible for the benevolent Deity to create beings in order to make them miſerable: but the chriſtian ſcriptures affirm (as we have ſeen) that everlaſting miſery is *the deſtination of the great maſs of human beings*; which is affirming, in other words, that the benevolent Deity hath actually done this horrible thing*.

It

* In Dr. Prieſtley's Inſtitutes of Natural and Revealed Religion, 2 vols. 8vo, pages 271, 272, of vol. i. we have theſe remarkable conceſſions: "It "is readily acknowledged that many propoſitions "are, in their own nature, abſurd; and, therefore, "that no evidence whatever can be of any avail to "the proof of them. If, for inſtance, a perſon "ſhould do what I ſhould not be able to diſtinguiſh "from *a real* miracle, pretending to prove by it

"that

It is generally underſtood, I believe, that the great object of the chriſtian revelation was to eſtabliſh the doctrine of a future ſtate. Mr. Paley ſays, " If I were to de-

" that the ſun did not riſe yeſterday, to contradict " ſuch a notorious hiſtorical fact as, there is ſuch a " place as Rome, or to refute ſo plain a propoſition " as this, that 2 and 2 make 4, he will not perſuade " me to admit any thing ſo contrary to experience, " to common ſenſe, or to unqueſtionable human " teſtimony. Alſo, the great outlines of natural " religion, reſpecting the providence and goodneſs " of God, and the great rules of human duty, " though they be not ſtrictly demonſtrable, yet " their very high degree of probability, and their " great importance to mankind, give them ſuch a " ſanction, that *we ought not to liſten to any evidence* " *that would tend to undermine them.* We may take " it for granted that God cannot *contradict* himſelf. " Whatever, therefore, he clearly appears to be in " his works, we may aſſure ourſelves that he will " alſo appear to be in any revelation that he ſhall " pleaſe to make of himſelf. He cannot appear " *good* and *merciful* in one method of making him- " ſelf known, and *cruel* and *unjuſt* in another."

" ſcribe,

" ſcribe, in a very few words, the ſcope " of chriſtianity as a *revelation*, I ſhould " ſay that it was, to influence the conduct " of human life, by eſtabliſhing the proof " of a future ſtate of rewards and puniſh- " niſhments—to bring life and immorta- " lity to light*." Chriſtians, therefore, who, as ſuch, are believers in a future ſtate, ſhould take their ideas of that ſtate from THE REPRESENTATIONS of it given in the NEW TESTAMENT. Now thoſe repreſentations, I think, cannot be true: and, as far as the great body of mankind is concerned, they have no reaſon to wiſh them to be ſo. If, indeed, it were the doctrine of Chriſt—That *the preſent* is a ſtate of diſcipline, to prepare men for happineſs in *a future ſtate*, by making them virtuous here; or if, as we unfortunately ſee the many do not become virtuous here, Chriſt had taught us that they

* See Paley's View of the Evidences of Chriſtianity, 8vo edition, 1796, pp. 24, 25.

muſt undergo *a future diſcipline*; but that, ultimately, they will attain to virtue and happineſs:—a future ſtate, ſo repreſented, would be *a deſirable thing*. But, alas! *puniſhment*, in ſcripture, is always deſcribed, *not* as a *benevolent diſcipline* *, to the generality of mankind, but as the execution of *juſt vengeance:* agreeably to what occurs in the following paſſage, taken from Paul's 2d Epiſtle to the Theſſalonians, chap. i. "It is *a righteous thing* with God to re-
"compenſe tribulation to them that trou-
"ble you, and to you, who are troubled,
"reſt with us, when the Lord Jeſus ſhall
"be revealed from heaven, with his migh-

* I am ſufficiently aware that the writer to the Hebrews (chap. xii.) repreſents the evils of life as anſwering the end of a ſalutary diſcipline to ſincere and pious chriſtians, but not to other men. "Whom "the Lord *loveth* he *chaſteneth*," ſays that writer; who is ſuppoſed to have been that ſame Paul who tells the Corinthians (as above mentioned), "We "are *chaſtened* of the Lord that we ſhould not be "*condemned with the world.*"

" ty angels, in flaming fire, *taking ven-*
" *geance* on them that know not God, and
" that obey not the goſpel of our Lord
" Jeſus Chriſt: who ſhall be puniſhed
" with *everlaſting deſtruction* from the pre-
" ſence of the Lord and from the glory of
" his power."

Nevertheleſs, it is my ſincere opinion, that a purer, a more dignified, or a more amiable religion was never exhibited to the ſons of men, than we find in what is called the Lord's prayer, in the parable of the prodigal, and other parts of Chriſt's diſcourſes: for inſtance, his affecting addreſs to his hearers on the ſubject of *anxiety*, which I will tranſcribe. " I ſay unto
" you, take no thought for your life, what
" ye ſhall eat, or what ye ſhall drink; nor
" yet for your body, what ye ſhall put on.
" Is not the life more than meat, and the
" body than raiment? Behold the fowls
" of the air: for they ſow not, neither do

" they reap, nor gather into barns; yet
" your *heavenly Father* feedeth them. Are
" not ye much better than they? Which
" of you, by taking thought [by his anx-
" iety], can add one cubit unto his ſtature?
" And why take ye thought for raiment?
" Conſider the lilies of the field, how they
" grow: they toil not, neither do they
" ſpin: and yet, I ſay unto you, that even
" Solomon, in all his glory, was not ar-
" rayed like one of theſe. Wherefore, if
" God ſo clothe the graſs of the field,
" which to-day is, and to-morrow is caſt
" into the oven, ſhall he not much more
" clothe you, O ye of little faith? There-
" fore, take no [anxious] thought, ſay-
" ing, What ſhall we eat? or what ſhall
" we drink? or, wherewithal ſhall we be
" clothed? for your *heavenly Father* know-
" eth that ye have need of all theſe things.
" But ſeek ye firſt the kingdom of God,
" and his righteouſneſs, and all theſe things
" ſhall be added unto you."

As

As another inſtance, I will tranſcribe his exhortation to *pray*.——" Aſk, and " it ſhall be given you: ſeek, and ye ſhall " find: knock, and it ſhall be opened unto " you: For every one that aſketh, re- " ceiveth; and he, that ſeeketh, findeth; " and, to him that knocketh, it ſhall be " opened.

" Or what man is there of you, of " whom if his ſon aſk bread, will he give " him a ſtone? or, if he aſk a fiſh, will he " give him a ſerpent?

" If ye then, being evil, know how to " give good gifts unto your children, how " much more ſhall your *heavenly Father* " give good things to them that aſk " him *?"

The benevolent morality, likewiſe, in-

* See Matthew, chap. vi. and vii.

culcated by Chriſt, is truly admirable. A better ſpecimen cannot be given than we have in that beautiful and intereſting apologue of the man travelling to Jericho, who fell into the hands of robbers*: which I forbear to tranſcribe. I cannot, however, avoid remarking the divine ſimplicity of the doctrine which reſolves the whole of religion and morality into, thoſe grand principles, the *love of God*, and the *love of man*.

From what has been adduced, it appears that both the *ſentiments* and the *doctrines* of ſcripture are *diſcordant* in the extreme. A wiſe man will therefore *diſcriminate*. He will endeavour to "prove "all things, and hold faſt that which is "good." But, unfortunately, what is moſt *obnoxious* appears to me *inſeparably connected* with the doctrine which is acknowledg-

* See Luke, chap. x.

ed

ed to be the *grand article* of the chriſtian revelation; and therefore appears to have all the ſupport which the *miraculous authority* can afford it. However, though I own myſelf unable to refute the argument brought to prove that authority to be real, I am convinced that the doctrine, which repreſents the *benevolent Deity* as having created beings *in order to make them miſerable*, can never have the *ſeal of his authority*.

When I ſeriouſly conſider this *principal objection*, likewiſe that ſimilar one reſpecting the *extermination of the Canaanites*; and, laſtly, that grounded on the *antecedent improbability* of all revelation; I perceive myſelf, as I ſaid, *conſtrained* to become a *Sceptic*. Becauſe I would not do a raſh thing, I do not pronounce the revelations (as they are ſtyled) of the Old and New Teſtaments to be falſe: but I am very far indeed from believing them to be true.

In this ſtate of mind, and at my time of life, it is probable that my habits and my conduct will remain nearly ſuch as they have been. With reſpect to one article, nevertheleſs, I ſhall ceaſe to do as I have done. I ſhall no longer (at leaſt till I am better informed) by a ſolemn and public act declare myſelf to be a chriſtian: becauſe I would not do it, either by word or deed, in private converſation. Yet I am not aware of any thing which ſhould hinder me from rejoicing in the fatherly goodneſs of God; I know of nothing which ſhould hinder me from contemplating, with delight, his benevolent providence, without which "not a ſparrow falls to the ground;" or even from lifting up my heart to him, with humble confidence, as to the original and genuine ſource of all that is excellent and good. Perhaps, too, my chriſtian friends will permit me, when the melancholy ſcenes of human calamity force my attention, to conſole myſelf with the reviving hope

——— " That this dark ſtate,
" In wayward paſſions loſt and vain purſuits,
" This *infancy* of being, cannot prove,
" The *final iſſue* of the works of God."

THOMSON.

I have now, my dear Sir, finiſhed what I had to ſay to you: and, leaving you to judge of it,

I remain

Yours affectionately,

J. H.

# *AN APOLOGY*

FOR THE DISBELIEF

OF

# REVEALED RELIGION:

BEING

*A SEQUEL*

TO

SOBER AND SERIOUS REASONS

FOR

SCEPTICISM, &c.

# ADVERTISEMENT,

*Printed with the firſt Edition.*

---

HE writer of the enſuing pages
as therein aſſerted (intentionally at
aſt) the cauſe of religious truth;
id, *ſo far*, preſumes, that he has con-
urred with liberal chriſtians, who,
truſts, will judge him with candour,
, at leaſt, with equity. But he
ill own that, having differed on a
bject of great importance from a
umber of his friends, it has, like-
iſe, been his object to vindicate
ore fully this part of his conduct,
d to preſerve as much of their
eem as may be. It is meant, in-
ed, that what he has written ſhall
principally among thoſe friends.

AN

# APOLOGY, &c.

WHEN the advocates of revealed religion make demands upon us for our faith, it ſeems very natural, in this age of free inquiry and diſcuſſion, for a thoughtful man to reflect on the matter or matters which we are required to believe. "I find myſelf (ſuch a man may ſay) ſituated, as I "conceive, in the midſt of the UNIVERSE of God. I contemplate the "phenomena *around me*, and perceive nothing at reſt; but the grand ſucceſſion "of events which fall under my notice, "takes place uniformly and regularly, according to eſtabliſhed laws, from the revolution of the heavenly bodies, to the "change of ſeaſons upon this earthly globe,

"and

" and to the circulation of the blood in an
" animal ſyſtem. From what I experi-
" ence *within me*, I am convinced that
" mind is governed by laws as incontroul-
" able as the laws of matter; becauſe I am
" invariably determined to action by the
" ſtrongeſt motive, and I cannot doubt
" that other men are determined in the
" ſame manner. All things, therefore,
" which come to paſs were, I conclude,
" ordained by, and ſpring from, the opera-
" tion of that original Cauſe, the wiſe
" and benevolent Author of the univerſe;
" who, being perfectly acquainted with
" individual and univerſal nature, knew
" from everlaſting how to diſpoſe properly
" of every being and every thing, and to
" what influences it was proper to ſubject
" them, in order to produce the propoſed
" reſult, viz. the *greateſt ſum of good*. As
" a true Theiſt, it is thus I conceive of
" the Deity exerting his power agreeably
" to eſtabliſhed and invariable laws: for

" *with*

"*with him is no variableneſs or ſhadow of* "*turning.*"

It ſeems impoſſible to conſider this great Being as accompliſhing his purpoſe by this uniform and invariable mode of operation, without apprehending it to be the moſt dignified mode, and perfectly ſuitable to his character: and, on the other hand, it ſeems likewiſe impoſſible to contemplate him as *deviating* from this mode ſo ſimple and ſublime, and as *diſturbing his own eſtabliſhed order* by working *miracles*, without eſteeming ſuch a *deviation* to be a thing derogatory from him, becauſe implying a *defect* of wiſdom or of power. But however unworthy of him ſuch a *deviation* may appear, it is what all the advocates of revelation contend for, and require us to believe. Indeed, there is a great difference between the opinions of ſome and others of them, reſpecting the *extent* to which the miraculous power has been exerted;

erted; ſome thinking all the miraculous ſtories in the Old Teſtament to be true, and deeming all the ſcriptural books, without exception, to have the divine ſanction and authority; while others think a number of thoſe ſtories to be fabulous, and entirely diſbelieve the inſpiration of the greateſt part of ſcripture.

It has been the general opinion among chriſtians that, in the ſcriptures, the Deity has revealed to mankind the knowledge of himſelf and of his providential government, and likewiſe the knowledge of true and genuine morality. And it is remarkable that thoſe chriſtians who have believed *leaſt* reſpecting inſpiration, have joined with thoſe who have believed *moſt* in extolling ſcriptural religion and morality as far the pureſt and the beſt, and in defending the ſacred books when cenſured for containing both doctrines and examples of irreligion and immorality.

Whether any unprejudiced perſon could remain unconvinced of the juſtice of ſuch a charge after reading thoſe books, I will not determine: but ſurely prejudice itſelf muſt admit it to be an extraordinary circumſtance that the noble Lord preſiding in the Court of King's-Bench ſhould, on a recent occaſion*, have doubted whether he ought to keep his ſeat in that court while Mr. Stewart Kyd read paſſages from the Holy Bible. His lordſhip, indeed, objected to the reading *parts* of the Bible. But though it is true that detached parts of a connected diſſertation may convey a meaning very different from what the writer intended, this obſervation (as every one muſt ſee) does not affect entire and unmutilated narratives, ſuch as thoſe in queſtion, references to which I ſhall put in the note ſubjoined †.

But,

* The trial of Williams for publiſhing the Age of Reaſon, 24th of June, 1797.

† The cenſurable paſſages, as Mr. Kyd underſtood

But, what muſt be a moſt important conſideration to a *religious* man, in thoſe books

ſtood them to be, conſiſt of obſcene ſtories, with which he has joined Solomon's famous Song as an inſtance of voluptuous debauchery: they conſiſt, likewiſe, of inſtances of cruel and torturous executions and unrelenting vindictiveneſs. Relations of the firſt ſort (though certainly not all equally liable to objection) he merely cited, as

The ſtory of Sarah's giving Hagar to Abraham, Gen. ch. xvi.

The tranſaction of Lot's two daughters with their father, Gen. ch. xix.

The diſputes of Rachel and Leah about the poſſeſſion of Jacob's perſon, and their giving each her handmaid to Jacob, Gen. ch. xxx.

The hiſtory of the rape of Dinah, Gen. ch. xxxiv.

The ſtory of Judah and Tamar, Gen. ch. xxxviii.

The ſolicitation of Joſeph by Potiphar's wife, Gen. ch. xxxix.

The ſtory of Zimri, and Coſbi the Midianitiſh woman, Numb. ch. xxv.

——— of Samſon and Delilah, Judges, ch. xvi.

——— of the Levites' concubine abuſed by the Gibeathites, Judges, ch. xix.

——— of Abigail, the wife of Nabal, becoming the wife of David, 1 Sam. ch. xxv.

The

books we find a repreſentation not merely unworthy and degrading, but an impious repreſent-

The ſtory of Ammon, one of the ſons of David, debauching Tamar, the ſiſter of Abſalom, another of David's ſons, 2 Sam. ch. xiii.

——— of the ſame Abſalom debauching his father's concubines in the face of all Iſrael, on the houſe-top, 2 Sam. ch. xvi.

——— of David and Bath-ſheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, 2 Sam. ch. xi.

Mr. Kyd ſaid, he forbore to read theſe ſtories at length, becauſe he felt it his duty to ſpare the modeſty of an Engliſh audience: for the ſame reaſon he did not read, but refer to the Song of Solomon: but with reſpect to the inſtances of cruel and torturous execution, and unrelenting vindictiveneſs, he did not feel himſelf reſtrained, and the narratives of theſe he propoſed to read, when Lord Kenyon interfered: and the jury not wiſhing to hear them, Mr. K. cited the paſſages as they follow:

The ſtory of the treacherous and cruel revenge of the two ſons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, on the Shechemites, Gen. ch. xxxiv.

The hiſtory of the ſlaughter of the Midianites, Numb. ch. xxxi.

The ſlaughter of the Canaanites by the com-

repreſentation of the eternal Deity. The more liberal chriſtians, when ſpeaking of

mand of God; particularly the conduct of Joſhua to the men of Ai, Joſh. ch. viii. and the ſlaughter of the five kings, Joſh. ch. x.

The ſtory of Siſera and Jael, and the Song of Deborah and Barak in exultation at the event, Judges, ch. iv. and v.

The murder of the people of Jabeſh Gilead, for not having gone up with the reſt of the tribes againſt Benjamin, in the caſe of the Levite's concubine, Judges, ch. xxi.

The account of Samuel hewing Agag in pieces before the Lord in Gilgal, 1 Sam. ch. xv.

The unneceſſary and wanton cruelty of David to the inhabitants of Rabba, the chief city of Ammon, taken after its ſiege by Joab, 2 Sam. ch. xii.

The murder of Saul's ſeven innocent ſons, on pretence of their father's ſlaughter of the Gibeonites, being the cauſe of ſeven years' famine, 2 Sam. ch. xxi.

David's dying charge to Solomon, reſpecting Joab and Shimei, 1 Kings, ch. ii.

The ſlaughter of ſeventy of Ahab's ſons, 2 Kings, ch. x.

God,

God, as creator, have told us, "That the "world originated from his infinite good- "neſs; that he is the benevolent parent of "all mankind, and that his object in creat- "ing them, was to make them virtuous "and happy." And, without doubt, all this is the natural and genuine conſequence to be inferred from the character of a being infinitely wiſe and good, and powerful. From the books of ſcripture, however, we learn no ſuch thing. When we read in thoſe books what is mentioned, reſpecting the creation, we meet with ſuch paſſages as the following: "The heavens declare "the glory of God, and the firmament "ſheweth his handy-work." "By the word "of the Lord were the heavens made, "and all the hoſt of them by the breath "of his mouth." It is in this, or a ſimilar ſtrain, that creation is ſpoken of: and we learn that the world originated from the *power*, indeed, of God; but it is never, I think, aſcribed to his *benevolence*. But if

any paſſages of thoſe books were meant to teach us, that the object of the Deity, in giving being to his intelligent creatures, was the *virtuous happineſs* of thoſe creatures; this could never be reconciled with the account given by Chriſt and his apoſtles concerning the *unhappy deſtination* of the majority of the human race. A philoſophical chriſtian muſt maintain that, under the government of a perfect Deity, no *puniſhments* can take place except ſuch as are *diſciplinary:* but will he be able to ſhew us that ſcripture puniſhments are ever ſo characterized, unleſs when certain *favourites* are in queſtion; as when Paul declares, "*We* are *chaſtened* of the Lord "that we ſhould not be *condemned* with the "*world?*" The *ſpirit of puniſhment*, indeed, appears to be a *ſpirit of vengeance* from the beginning of the Old Teſtament to the end of the New. In the more antient books, we read of ſuch expreſſions as theſe coming from the mouth of God: "I

"will

" will render vengeance to mine enemies—
" I will make mine arrows drunk with
" blood *:" " I will tread them in mine
" anger, and trample them in my fury †:"
" I poured out mine indignation upon
" them, I have conſumed them with the
" fire of my wrath ‡." And in the later books we find ſuch paſſages concerning God's treatment of his human offspring, as the following: " The Lord Jeſus ſhall be
" revealed from heaven, with his mighty
" angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance
" on them that know not God, and that
" obey not the goſpel of our Lord Jeſus
" Chriſt: who ſhall be puniſhed with ever-
" laſting deſtruction from the preſence of
" the Lord, and from the glory of his
" power §:" " If any man worſhip the
" beaſt and his image, and receive his mark
" in his forehead or in his hand, the ſame
" ſhall drink of the wine of the wrath of

* Deuteron. ch. xxxii. † Iſaiah, ch. lxiii.
‡ Ezek. ch. xxii. § 2 Theſſ. ch. i.

" God which is poured out, without mix-
" ture, into the cup of his indignation; and
" he ſhall be tormented with fire and brim-
" ſtone in the preſence of the holy angels,
" and in the preſence of the Lamb: and
" the ſmoke of their torment aſcendeth up
" for ever and ever*." Now, when we read ſuch paſſages as the above, delivered to us by jewiſh and chriſtian writers, we have ideas irreſiſtibly forced upon our minds; ideas which ill accord with the character of a benevolent creator conducting his intelligent creatures to virtue by means of a *ſalutary diſcipline*, but agreeing much too well with that of an evil dæmon producing,

* It has been objected that there is not any thing in the book of Revelation which will prove the doctrine of eternal torments for *human beings* to be a ſcriptural doctrine, though the book is of acknowledged authority among chriſtians; becauſe the beaſt and falſe prophet are myſterious perſonages. But however myſterious they be, the *worſhippers* of the beaſt are deſcribed as *men*: the objection, therefore, is not to the purpoſe.

and

and gratifying himſelf with, the ſpectacle of human miſery *.

There can be no doubt that the learned and very reſpectable Dr. Geddes is a believer both in the jewiſh and the chriſtian revelation, although he has not told us how much of the ſcripture he conceives to have the unqueſtionable ſanction of the Deity. In the general preface to his tranſlation of the Bible, which will not appear till his great work is finiſhed, he will explain himſelf more fully. In the mean time, having occaſion to ſpeak of the extirpation of the Canaanites, in the preface to his ſecond volume, he has, like a good and upright man, expreſſed himſelf thus in a note: "After all that has been written, either by "jews or chriſtians, in defence of this ſan-

* The above citation from the Apocalypſe informs us, that the holy angels and the Lamb are admitted to the enviable privilege of participating in this horrid ſpecies of gratification.

" guinary meaſure, I confeſs my reaſon
" and my religion continually revolt at it:
" and I cannot bring myſelf to believe that
" ſuch an order proceeded from the mouth
" of God; perhaps not even from the
" mouth of Moſes. I am rather willing
" to ſuſpect that it is the fabrication of
" ſome poſterior jew, to juſtify the cruel-
" ties of his nation. And indeed it is the
" ſhorteſt way to juſtify any meaſure, and
" to obviate all troubleſome objections.
" Such a deed could not be unjuſt, ſince
" God authorized and commanded it: who
" will preſume to ſay that what God com-
" mands is unjuſt? True; but then we
" muſt firſt be well aſſured that he has
" commanded; and the very appearance
" of injuſtice in the act, is to me a ſtronger
" proof that he did not command it, than
" the authority of all the jewiſh hiſtorians
" put together. I was grieved to read in
" a late elegant *Apology for the Bible* ſo lame
" a juſtification of that paſſage: and am
" tempted

" tempted ſometimes to think that the " right reverend author muſt have felt the " weakneſs of his argument, and ſeen the " diſparity of his ſimile." Such, and ſo liberal is the manner in which Dr. Geddes has expreſſed himſelf: and I own it is gratifying to me, to find that what I have advanced, in oppoſition to the biſhop's argument, has ſo far the concurrence of ſuch a man *. He has likewiſe, much to his honour, when animadverting on the pretended divine order for extirpating the Amalekites, thrown out, with virtuous indignation, the following apoſtrophe: " But, " O God of Juſtice, couldſt thou, then, " have given the ſanguinary injunction to " deſtroy, without mercy and without ex- " ception, a whole unoffending nation, " men, women, and children, for a crime, " real or ſuppoſed, committed by their an- " ceſtors four hundred years before? Cre- " dat Judæus Apella!"

* See above, pp. 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28.

In

In the further proſecution of my deſign, I ſhall now bring forward, and comment more or leſs upon certain *narratives* from the Old Teſtament; and I ſhall do the ſame reſpecting a very important and diſtinguiſhed *doctrine* of the New.

I ſhall next animadvert on the *morality* of the New Teſtament.

I ſhall then ſhew why I think that, even though a *part* of the objectionable matter might be rejected, the *whole* could not, conſiſtently with the belief of the chriſtian revelation.

And, laſtly, I ſhall give my reaſons for eſtimating the argument from *teſtimony* as unſound and inſufficient.

## SECTION I.

### *Of Objectionable Stories and Doctrine.*

ALTHOUGH it ſhould ſeem that any exhibition of miracles, to the diſturbance and interruption of the courſe of nature, muſt be a proceeding unworthy of the immutable Author of nature, it may be obſerved that, ſome of thoſe miraculous ſtories related in the jewiſh hiſtory, ſtrike one as peculiarly degrading to his character. Very ſtrange it is to read of *colloquial diſcourſes* paſſing between that great and aſtoniſhing Being and his human creatures. Nevertheleſs we read of many ſuch colloquies with Abraham and others. But what muſt we think when we are told, Gen. ch. xx. that this ſame Abraham, while a ſojourner at a place called Gerar, baſely repreſented his wife Sarah as being

being his *ſiſter* and not his *wife*, thus conniving at an adulterous commerce between her and Abimelech the king of Gerar, which Abraham, it appears, *expected* to take place, though, as the ſtory ſays, it did not: becauſe God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and informed him that he had taken the wife of a man who was a *prophet*, requiring Abimelech, therefore, to reſtore the man his wife, otherwiſe (as we learn from this curious ſtory) God ſays, "Thou ſhalt "ſurely die; thou and *all that is thine.*" We are further acquainted that God appointed Abraham the *prophet* to pray for the king that he might live. "So Abra-"ham prayed unto God: and God healed "Abimelech (yet it does not otherwiſe appear that he was ſick) and his wife and "his maid ſervants; and they bare chil-"dren; for the Lord had faſt cloſed up all "the wombs of the houſe of Abimelech "becauſe of Sarah, Abraham's wife."—I

ſay,

ſay, what muſt we think of ſuch a tale as this occupying a place in a ſacred book? And notwithſtanding familiarity has a wonderful power of reconciling us to what is moſt abhorrent to our natures, ſurely a perſon tolerably free from prejudice, cannot fail to ſhudder, if he will ſeriouſly attend to what is related, Gen. ch. xxii. where we are told that God commanded Abraham to *offer up his ſon as a ſacrifice*, and that, in obedience to God, Abraham, having provided wood for the fire, and a knife, was juſt proceeding to *embrue his hands in his ſon's blood*, when he was prevented by an angel. That an act in itſelf ſo wicked, for which to be *prepared* and *wrought up*, it was requiſite for a man to do ſuch horrid and unnatural violence to himſelf, that ſuch an act ſhould be deemed acceptable to a juſt and benevolent Deity, is a ſad proof how miſerably the human mind may be perverted. This inſtance, however, of Abraham's obedience is re-

preſented

preſented by the hiſtorian as ſo meritorious* as to have obtained the divine bleſſing ſolemnly pronounced, and even ſworn, by God himſelf; and a declaration that, in Abraham's ſeed all the nations of the earth ſhould be bleſſed. And truly it has been very generally believed that, in this declaration, Chriſt was foretold, and the goſpel preached to Abraham: for which belief, it muſt be owned, there is what is called apoſtolical authority. And by the unthink-

* It cannot be denied that, if Iſaac had been taken from his father by a natural death, Abraham would have had an equal opportunity of diſplaying his *faith* and *pious reſignation*, as in the caſe related. His peculiar merit then, muſt conſiſt in his doing, or being ready to do, an act of horrid and unnatural wickedneſs at the command of God. One may add a remark which preſents itſelf on this occaſion, viz. That the trial ſeems to have been intended not ſo much for Abraham's *improvement* and *benefit* as for the *information* of the Omniſcient Being, who is made to ſay, by the mouth of the angel, "*Now*, I know that thou feareſt God: ſeeing thou haſt not witheld thy ſon, thine only ſon, from me."

ing

ing *many*, that authority will be eſteemed quite ſufficient to *ſanctify* the above ſuppoſed tranſaction: while the diſciples of reaſon and of nature, will never ceaſe to execrate the *impious fable* as worſe even than the former ſtory.

In the book of Exodus, ch. xxxii. we have the hiſtory of the golden calf, which Aaron made at the requeſt of the Iſraelites, and which they worſhipped. Wherefore we are told, "The Lord ſaid unto "Moſes, I have ſeen this people, and be- "hold it is a ſtiff necked people. Now, "therefore, let me alone, that my wrath "may wax hot againſt them, and that I "may conſume them: and I will make of "thee a great nation." The hiſtory then acquaints us that "Moſes beſought the "Lord his God, and ſaid, Lord, why doth "thy wrath wax hot againſt thy people, "which thou haſt brought out of the land of "Egypt?" &c. wherefore ſhould the Egyp-

" tians ſpeak and ſay, For miſchief did he
" bring them out, to ſlay them on the
" mountains, and to conſume them from
" the face of the earth? Turn from thy
" fierce wrath, and repent of this evil
" againſt thy people. Remember Abra-
" ham, Iſaac, and Iſrael, thy ſervants, to
" whom thou ſwareſt by thine own ſelf,
" and ſaidſt unto them, I will multiply your
" ſeed as the ſtars of heaven, and all this
" land that I have ſpoken of will I give
" unto your ſeed, and they ſhall inherit it
" for ever. And the Lord repented him
" of the evil which he thought to do unto
" his people." A very extraordinary re-preſentation this of the true God! and, when the reader has conſidered it well, he will decide whether it is more ſuitable to his character, or to the character of a frail, irritable, vain-glorious mortal. The *immutable* Deity is here repreſented as *liable to depart from his purpoſe*; and, when in great danger, from provocation, of break-

ing

ing his promiſe, though bound by his oath to perform it, as being *induced to repent of his raſhneſs by the fear of reproach.*

Dr. Geddes ſays, in the preface to vol. i. of his Tranſlation, p. 12, "Indeed the "whole tenor of the Pentateuch convinces "me that the more ancient Hebrews were "real anthropomorphites: and to this "alone, I think, we are to aſcribe all "thoſe expreſſions concerning the Deity "that ſeem to degrade the Deity." In this opinion I perfectly coincide with him, excepting that I muſt contend for its being a *real*, and not merely a *ſeeming* degradation. But if there were a revelation made to theſe Hebrews, in order to give them the knowledge of the one true God, we certainly ſhould not expect to find them anthropomorphites.

Another ſpecimen of what is ſo extremely offenſive in any work claiming to have the

ſanction of Heaven, ſhall be produced, not from the books of Moſes, but the 1ſt book of Samuel, ch. i. It is the account of the birth of Samuel, one of the moſt diſtinguiſhed perſonages in the Jewiſh hiſtory. The account ſays that a man named Elkanah had two wives, Hannah and Peninna: the latter of whom brought him children, while the firſt was barren, though ſhe ſeems to have been the moſt favoured. Between theſe two women there was much uneaſineſs, for we are told that Hannah's "adverſary provoked her ſore for to make "her fret, becauſe the Lord had ſhut "up her womb;" wherefore, it is added, "ſhe was in bitterneſs of ſoul, and prayed "unto the Lord, and wept ſore; and ſhe "vowed a vow and ſaid, O Lord of hoſts, "if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction "of thine handmaid, and remember me, "and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt "give unto thine handmaid a *man-child*, "then will I give him unto the Lord all the "days of his life," &c. In the ſequel we are informed

informed that her prayer was granted, that ſhe bare a ſon, and called his name Samuel.

It muſt be acknowledged there is in this little tale a number of circumſtances unneceſſary to be particularized by me, which would render it very intereſting if it reſpected not Almighty God, and only concerned ſome imagined *local deity* with human paſſions. But can any ſerious believer in the all-wiſe Creator and Governor of the world hear, with patience, of his interfering, by a miracle, to redreſs a grievance ariſing from a diſpute between Elkanah's two wives? I do not mean to be ludicrous, though ſome perſons might take the occaſion. I am in very ſerious earneſt, as I mean to be in all that I ſhall further advance.

It is not my intention to notice every think offenſive to religion, which is found in the Old Teſtament. I think it neceſ-

ſary, however, to bring forward certain matters related of the prophets Iſaiah, Ezekiel, and Hoſea.

In the xxth ch. of Iſaiah we read, "The "Lord ſpake by Iſaiah, the ſon of Amoz, "ſaying, Go, and *looſe the ſackcloth from off "thy loins*, and put off thy ſhoe from thy "foot: and he did ſo, walking *naked* and "*bare-foot*. And the Lord ſaid, like as "my ſervant Iſaiah hath walked naked and "bare-foot, three years, for a *ſign* and "*wonder* upon Egypt and upon Ethiopia: "ſo ſhall the king of Aſſyria lead away the "Egyptians priſoners, and the Ethiopians "captives, young and old, naked and bare-"foot, even *with their buttocks uncovered.*"

In the ivth ch. of Ezekiel, we read that he was commanded by God to make a repreſentation, on a tile of Jeruſalem beſieged:—that he was then commanded to lie firſt on his left ſide, during three hundred

dred and ninety days, and bear the iniquity of the houſe of Iſrael, and afterward to lie on his right ſide during forty days, and bear the iniquity of the houſe of Judah:—that he was further commanded to make a certain kind of bread, of which he was to eat while he lay on his ſide three hundred and ninety days:—and that he was likewiſe commanded to bake this bread *in the ſight* of his countrymen, with *human dung* *. And the Lord ſaid, (as we are told) "Even "*thus* ſhall the children of Iſrael eat their "defiled bread among the Gentiles whi-"ther I will drive them." We are, however, informed that, on his remonſtrating, the prophet was permitted to uſe cow's dung as a ſubſtitute.

What I ſhall produce reſpecting the prophet Hoſea, occurs in the firſt and third

* If the reader ſhould be diſguſted, he may very well ſuppoſe that I, too, am ſo. Nevertheleſs, if he will take the trouble to conſult his Bible, he will perceive that I am guilty of no exaggeration.

chapters of the book which bears his name. He is there ſaid to have received an order from God as thus: "Go, take unto thee "a wife of whoredoms and children of "whoredoms: for the land hath com- "mitted great whoredom, departing from "the Lord." It is added, "So he went and "took Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim [ſuppoſed a common proſtitute] "which conceived and bare him a ſon," and as the narrative further tells us, ſhe afterwards bare him two others. In the third chapter he ſpeaks of himſelf in the firſt perſon. "Then ſaid the Lord unto me, Go yet, "love a woman beloved of her friend, yet "an adultereſs, according to the love of "the Lord toward the children of Iſrael," &c. "So I bought her unto me for "fifteen pieces of ſilver, and for an homer "of barley, and an half homer of barley. "And I ſaid unto her, Thou ſhalt abide "for me many days, thou ſhalt not play "the harlot, and thou ſhalt not be for ano-

"ther

"ther man, ſo will I alſo be for thee." But he has not acquainted us that he had any children by this adultereſs.

Now, though there are many whoſe faith cannot be ſtaggered by any *indecency* or *abſurdity*, however groſs, or *wickedneſs*, however flagrant, which may appear to have the countenance of their religion, imagining that thereby ſuch enormities are conſecrated, and their very nature changed; there are yet ſome who are incapable of doing ſuch violence to their reaſon. Of this number was the late Mr. Farmer, a learned and ingenious man. According to this gentleman, many learned writers have attempted to ſhew that Hoſea's marrying Gomer, and taking to him children of whoredom—that Jeremiah's putting a linen girdle upon his loins, going to the Euphrates, and hiding it in a hole of a rock—that theſe, and many other actions aſcribed to the ancient prophets,

were only *imaginary* and *ſcenical*, and that narratives of this kind are to be underſtood as a hiſtory only of *prophetic viſions*, though it be not *poſitively ſaid* that the things related were no where performed but upon the ſtage of fancy. And Mr. Farmer, for himſelf, declares, "We may well allow "that all theſe things, or moſt of them, "were tranſacted only in viſion; not "merely becauſe we hereby avoid the in-"conveniences attending the literal in-"terpretation; but alſo becauſe the lively "repreſentation of theſe things in viſion "conveyed the ſame inſtruction, and an-"ſwered every purpoſe, as well as the real "performance could have done *." Notwithſtanding this bold aſſertion, it muſt be evident, to a perſon of the commoneſt underſtanding, that what thus paſſed, unobſerved by any but himſelf, in the prophet's

* See an Enquiry into the Nature and Deſign of Chriſt's Temptation in the Wilderneſs, p. 34. Note.

own

own imagination, could not convey inſtruction to other men, which we learn, from the account of ſeveral of theſe ſuppoſed tranſactions, was their object. Ezekiel, we are told, was ordered to bake his bread *in the ſight* of his countrymen; Iſaiah to walk naked and bare-foot for a *ſign* and a *wonder*; and I think, though it is not expreſsly ſo affirmed, we are given to underſtand that what is ſaid to have been done by Hoſea was meant for a *ſign* and a *wonder* too. Yet, as *ſigns* and *wonders*, it is certain that theſe ſuppoſed tranſactions could not anſwer their end, unleſs they were not viſionary matters, but matters of fact, and matters alſo of *public notoriety*. I ſhall not diſpute the *convenience* of this mode of interpretation, which ſeems to have been the grand reaſon for adopting it *.

Such are ſome of the unworthy, and I ſcruple not to ſtyle them impious, repre-

* See Appendix, No. 1.

ſentations

fentations of the Deity found in the Old Teſtament. But it has been aſſerted that, nothing can be more engaging, or more conſiſtent with true philoſophy, than the amiable repreſentations of the Supreme, which the New Teſtament affords; where he is continually deſcribed as a Father:—*whoſe deſign, therefore, muſt be to make his children*, i. e. *all his creatures, happy*.

Now I am very willing to admit that true philoſophy would indeed lead us to conceive of God as the UNIVERSAL PARENT: but I am perſuaded that this idea never found its way into the mind of Jeſus Chriſt, or the minds of his apoſtles. The term Father, as uſed by them, ſeems to denote the relation ſubſiſting, or imagined to ſubſiſt, between the Deity and the *Chriſtian brotherhood*, "the houſehold of "faith," with Jeſus Chriſt at the head of it. This appears from the account given by Chriſt and his apoſtles of the *future con-*

*dition*

*dition* to which the great majority of the human race is deſtined; which is *a ſtate of miſery without end.*

That Chriſt meant his hearers ſhould thus conceive of the future condition of wicked men, whom he always deſcribes as the great majority, there ſeems no room to doubt when we read his reiterated declarations concerning the fire that *never ſhall be quenched*, and the worm that *dieth not*. The language is utterly improper, and what he could not have uſed, if he intended to be underſtood as holding out the puniſhment of *annihilation*, or *complete deſtruction*. In that caſe, the appropriate terms would have been a *conſuming* fire and a *devouring* worm. The language, moreover, employed by Chriſt, correſponds perfectly with the apocalyptical account of a lake of fire where men are to be tormented, and where the ſmoke of their torment is ſaid to aſcend for ever and ever.

But certain philoſophical chriſtians being ſhocked, as well they may be, at ſuch a doctrine, affirm that there are no words of Chriſt which expreſs, i. e expreſs *literally*, the idea of eternal torments. The writings of the New Teſtament, it is true, are remarkable for *figurative* expreſſions. However, the ſenſe of any writer may be clear and determinate, when the expreſſion is *figurative*. If one ſhould ſay, "The fleet "ſailed from the *mouth* of the river; or, "The cottage ſtands at the *foot* of the "mountain:" I cannot believe any man would contend that the words compoſing either of thoſe ſentences do not convey a meaning clear and determinate. It ſeems evident to me, therefore, that a doctrine may be clearly taught in a book where it is never once expreſſed *literally*. And, therefore, when Jeſus Chriſt addreſſed his hearers in the terms above quoted, it appears to me that he taught, though not literally, the doctrine of *eternal torments*, this being the *genuine import* of his words.

It is extraordinary that thoſe philoſophical chriſtians, who ſay they derive their belief of a future ſtate of virtuous happineſs for all human beings from the goſpel of Jeſus Chriſt, ſhould yet find themſelves compelled to acknowledge (as I believe moſt of them do acknowledge) that Jeſus Chriſt himſelf, and his apoſtles, with the exception of Paul, expected the *ultimate deſtruction* of the wicked, like chaff and tares caſt into an unquenchable fire, or a carcaſe expoſed to an immortal worm, which muſt in time be totally conſumed. But if Chriſt and his apoſtles expected, and taught, that the Deity intended to conſign the great majority of the human race to a miſerable exiſtence firſt, and then to ultimate deſtruction, they unqueſtionably never drew the philoſophical inference from the *paternal character* of the Deity—that it muſt be his deſign to make his *children* (viz. all his creatures) happy. With their views, ſo to reaſon was impoſſible. And further we may remark,

though

## SECTION II.

### *Of the Morality of the New Teſtament.*

I SHALL now proceed to conſider the morality of the New Teſtament, which by the late Mr. Soame Jenyns was deemed to poſſeſs ſuch peculiar excellence as alone to furniſh proof of the truth of the chriſtian revelation. This he has endeavoured to ſhew in his book on the Internal Evidence. The account of evangelical morality there given by that very elegant and ingenious writer has been highly commended by a living author of great reputation, Archdeacon Paley; though he is of opinion that the proper argument for chriſtianity, as a revelation, reſts upon other ground. The archdeacon, moreover, thus ſpeaks on the ſubject for himſelf.

" The truth is, there are two oppoſite
" deſcrip-

" deſcriptions of character under which " mankind may generally be placed. The " one poſſeſſes vigour, firmneſs, reſolu- " tion, is daring and active, quick in its " ſenſibilities, jealous of its fame, eager in " its attachments, inflexible in its purpoſe, " violent in its reſentments.

" The other meek, yielding, comply- " ing, forgiving: not prompt to act, but " willing to ſuffer, ſilent and gentle under " rudeneſs and inſult, ſuing for reconcilia- " tion where others would demand ſatisfac- " tion, giving way to the puſhes of impu- " dence, conceding and indulgent to the " prejudices, the wrongheadedneſs, the in- " tractability of thoſe with whom it has " to deal.

" The former of theſe characters is, and " ever hath been, the favourite of the " world. It is the character of great men. " There is a *dignity* in it which univerſally " commands reſpect.

" The latter is *poor-ſpirited, tame* and " *abject*. Yet ſo it hath happened that, " with the founder of chriſtianity, this " latter is the ſubject of his commenda- " tion, his precepts, his *example*; and that " the former is ſo in no part of its compo- " ſition. This, and nothing elſe, is the cha- " racter deſigned in the following remark- " able paſſages: *Reſiſt not evil, but who- " ſoever ſhall ſmite thee on the right cheek, " turn to him the other alſo; and if any man " will ſue thee at the law, and take away " thy coat, let him have thy cloke alſo; and " whoſoever ſhall compel thee to go a mile, go " with him twain: love your enemies; bleſs " them that curſe you; do good to them that " hate you; and pray for them which deſpite- " fully uſe you, and perſecute you.* This, " certainly, is not common-place morality. " It is very original. It ſhews at leaſt " (and it is for this purpoſe we produce " it) that no two things can be more dif- " ferent than the heroic and the Chriſtian " character."

" Now

" Now the author to whom I refer " [Mr. Jenyns] has not only remarked " this difference more ſtrongly than any " preceding writer, but has proved in con- " tradiction to firſt impreſſions, to popular " opinion, to the encomiums of orators " and poets, and even to the ſuffrages " of hiſtorians and moraliſts, that the latter " poſſeſſes the moſt of true worth, as being " moſt difficult either to be acquired or " ſuſtained, and as contributing moſt to " the happineſs of ſocial life *." Mr. Paley then gives the ſtate of Mr. Jenyns's argument. But, not to extend the quotation, let us admit that the latter of theſe characters is demonſtrated to be the preferable one. Nevertheleſs, may it not ſtill be, in point of moral excellence, very inferior to what we can conceive? And may we not, very naturally, inquire further,

* See Paley's View of the Evidences of Chriſtianity, vol. ii. pp. 101, 102, 103, 104.



145725

Whether it be not poſſible to reſiſt and oppoſe the unjuſt treatment of wicked men, without being actuated by a ſpirit of revenge?

Whether the oppoſing injuſtice, with firmneſs and temper, be not the beſt way to *check* it?

Whether non-reſiſtance of ill-treatment be not the ready way to *invite* it*?

* The Quakers ſeem to have been the only *conſiſtent* chriſtians in regard to the doctrine of non-reſiſtance: all other chriſtians having not only practiſed in direct oppoſition to their Maſter's precepts, but having, likewiſe, contumaciouſly defended their practice. On this occaſion, I cannot avoid recollecting the ridicule upon the conduct of the Friends, which Lord Lyttelton, the great champion of chriſtianity, has put into the mouth of Cortez, the conqueror of Mexico, in his dialogue with William Penn. And, I doubt not, his lordſhip conſidered Cortez's retort not merely as natural for him to uſe, but as *juſt* in itſelf.—See Dialogues of the Dead.

Whether

Whether the happineſs of ſocial life be not better promoted by properly *checking* unjuſt men, than by *inviting* and *encouraging* them to acts of injuſtice?

Whether the precepts enjoining the non-reſiſtance of evil, the complying with unjuſt requirements, even beyond what is required, the giving more of one's property to him who would wrongfully take away a part (i. e. literally giving a reward for a robbery) do not enjoin a *falſe* and *unſound* ſpecies of morality? And, laſtly,

Whether it be reaſonable to expect that *ſuch* morality ſhould proceed from a teacher of morals, immediately ſent from God, and by him ſpecially appointed to that office?

In a ſermon of Tillotſon's, on the obligations of chriſtians to a holy life, he uſes this language, "When thou art about to "*debaſe* thyſelf—remember thou art a

"chriſtian." So ſpeaks the archbiſhop; and he is, by no means, ſingular. But the exhortation does not accord very happily with the archdeacon's deſcription of the chriſtian character, as being a *poor-ſpirited* thing, *tame* and *abject*; a character, however, which he affirms that Chriſt himſelf *exemplified*. This, it muſt be owned, is extraordinary, as coming from a friend to chriſtianity, and a chriſtian advocate. What other chriſtians think of it, I know not. Yet it is certainly a queſtion which they will do well to conſider attentively, Whether Mr. Paley be authorized, by the paſſages he has cited, to apply, as he has, the above-mentioned revolting epithets? Whatever may be their determination on this point, it muſt be evident, I think, to any perſon who will exerciſe his judgment freely, as on other occaſions, that the morality of the New Teſtament is, at leaſt, *imperfect* and *defective*. But I will venture to go further and to affirm, that the doc-

trine

trine exhibited in that book, as delivered by Chriſt himſelf, is, in ſome inſtances, highly cenſurable for its *immorality*. In proof of this charge, I appeal to two parables recorded in Matthew's hiſtory. In the firſt of theſe* we are told of a king who had a ſervant that ſtood indebted to him in the amount of ten thouſand talents. "But for as much (ſays the ſtory) as he "had not to pay, his lord commanded "him to be *ſold*, and his wife and chil- "dren, and all that he had, and payment "to be made." However, upon the debtor's ſupplication, we are informed that his lord *forgave* him. This ſervant, nevertheleſs, refuſing to ſhew like mercy to a fellow-ſervant who owed him a hundred talents, it is ſaid, "his lord was wroth, and deli- "vered him to the *tormentors* till he ſhould "pay all that was due unto him." It is obſervable, we are not told that *the wife and children* of this ſervant were delivered

* See xviiith chapter.

to the tormentors, though in the firſt inſtance they were ordered to be ſold. But, paſſing over this matter, I would requeſt ſerious and honeſt men to declare, whether they, in their conſciences, eſteem it a right, or a wrong procedure, to *torment* a perſon for the non-payment of what, it is confeſſed, he *cannot* pay? And then, Whether they can ſee any juſtice in puniſhing a man for the non-payment of a debt which has been *cancelled?* What is moſt deſerving of notice in the ſtory is, this unrighteous king is propoſed as the *repreſentative* of the Deity.

In the other parable* we have preſented to us a houſeholder who is ſaid to have hired labourers to work in his vineyard, and to have agreed to pay the ſame ſum to all, notwithſtanding ſeveral of them were hired at a very late hour. When the evening arrived, we are told, "The lord of the

* Matt. xxth chapter.

"vineyard

" vineyard ſaid unto his ſteward, Call the " labourers and give them their hire, be- " ginning from the *laſt* unto the firſt." But they who had laboured the whole day murmured, upon ſeeing thoſe who had laboured one hour only paid equally with themſelves. Upon which, the lord of the vineyard is repreſented as addreſſing one of the murmurers in the following terms: " Friend, I do thee no wrong: didſt thou " not agree with me for a penny? Take " that thine is, and go thy way: I will " give unto this laſt even as unto thee. " Is it not *lawful* for me *to do what I will* " *with my own?* Is thine eye *evil* becauſe " I am *good?*" Now, though it ſhould be granted that there was no breach of juſtice in paying the *ſame ſum* to the labourers of one hour and to thoſe who had " borne " the burthen and heat of the day*," yet the

* I do not know that any learned theologian has ever attempted to reconcile the doctrine taught here

the making ſuch a diſtinction in the *preſence* of thoſe who had dearly earned their hire, will ſcarcely fail to receive the blame due to an *invidious act* from every good mind which *dares* to have an opinion. But the thing which is moſt ſtriking, and peculiarly objectionable, is, the *general maxim* implied in the queſtion, "May I "not *do what I will with my own?*" From the mouth of a deſpot, one would not wonder to hear this language; it might ſuit well enough the character of an avaricious churl, or a riotous libertine; but ſurely it is not what we ſhould expect a good man to utter; notwithſtanding the perſon to whom it is attributed calls himſelf ſo. It is, however, moſt extraordinary that this

here with the doctrine that men ſhall be rewarded *according to their works*. Neither do I remember to have met with any one who undertook to ſhew how well the conduct aſcribed to the lord of the vineyard ſquared with that excellent precept, "Whatſoever ye would that men ſhould do unto "you, do ye even ſo unto them."

perſon

perſon ſhould, like the king in the preceding ſtory, be made to repreſent the *Author of all good.*

But, as the moral capacity of man is derived from his intellect, and as the *higheſt* ſpecies of moral merit cannot exiſt without much intellectual improvement, it is neceſſary, in eſtimating the morality of the New Teſtament, to conſider what aſpect the doctrines of that book have upon intellectual culture. And, I think, it will ſcarcely be affirmed that what we call a liberal curioſity or deſire of knowledge ever received much encouragement either from Chriſt or his apoſtles. The genius, indeed, of chriſtianity ſeems quite unfriendly to the purſuits of ſcience and philoſophy.—Chriſtians are told that One Thing is needful,—that they are pilgrims and ſtrangers on earth, and ſhould ſeek a better country; and they are exhorted to ſet their affections on things

things above, not on earthly things. What Mr. Jenyns ſays of this *detachment from the world* well deſerves notice. He deſcribes it as "a moral virtue conſtituted by this "religion [chriſtianity] alone: ſo new "that, even at this day, few of its profeſ- "ſors can be perſuaded that it is required, "or that it is any virtue at all*." True it is, that he ſeems to have thought it needed ſome explanation: and ſome perſons may imagine he has pretty well explained it away. To me it appears that, where this new virtue has *taken faſt hold*, the mind has generally been diſqualified for ſcientific purſuits, and for any other than imagined heavenly ones: and, upon the other hand, I believe, on inquiry, it will be found that, where chriſtians have attained great eminence as philoſophers, they have ſet their affections both on ſcience itſelf and on that *diſtinguiſhed ſituation*

* See Jenyns's View of the Internal Evidence, &c. p. 85.

which

which they have occupied among their fellow men. "They have received ho-"nour one from another, and ſought not "the honour which cometh from God "only."

That Chriſt himſelf was no friend to philoſophical inveſtigation is evident from the manner in which he delivered his inſtructions. He ſeldom, if ever, ſpoke but in the tone of authority, and required his *ſayings* to be received implicitly, on pain of incurring the diſpleaſure and even the condemnation of the Almighty. And Paul, though an argumentative writer, and by ſome complimented with the title of philoſopher, ſo far from recommending, has expreſsly cautioned thoſe to whom he wrote againſt the miſchievous tendency of philoſophy. It is alleged, indeed, that Paul, by the term, intended to deſignate the doctrine of the Gnoſtics. If ſo, he is cenſurable for great inaccuracy, not to ſay injuſtice,

injuſtice, in giving excluſively the name of philoſophy to what he eſteemed falſe and miſchievous, while (as it is ſuppoſed by theſe his advocates) he was acquainted with a better philoſophy, the advantages of which he withheld from thoſe for whoſe inſtruction he was writing. In my opinion, the praiſe of philoſophical inveſtigation was not due to him for any thing of his which I have ſeen; and I do not conceive that he either was, or pretended to be, a philoſopher. A philoſopher inquires concerning *truth* and *good*; likewiſe concerning the *nature of man*, and what it is which conſtitutes his perfection and happineſs: And where any *religion* whatſoever is in queſtion, he inquires whether it bears the marks of *truth* and *good*, and how it is calculated to influence the mind. Moreover he is very cautious in his inquiry, leſt he ſhould be ſubjected to impoſition, always demanding what ſhall appear to him juſt and ſatisfactory evidence.

Now

Now to me, it ſeems as if it had been the object of Paul to *reprobate* ſuch inquiries, and to *brand* them, as highly offenſive to the Deity. "It is written, (ſaith he to the Corinthians, Epiſ. i. chap. 1.) "I will deſtroy the wiſdom of the wiſe, "and will bring to nothing the underſtand- "of the prudent. Where is the wiſe? "Where is the ſcribe? Where is the diſ- "puter of this world? Hath not God "made fooliſh the wiſdom of this world?" —and adds much more in the ſame ſtrain.

Upon the whole, it is ſufficiently evident that the morality of the New Teſtament, defective as it is, and in certain inſtances pernicious, is not of divine origin; and it is equally plain that, the detachment from the world, the ſubmiſſive acquieſcence and implicit faith required by its firſt teachers, are hoſtile to intellectual improvement. I ſtrongly ſuſpect, indeed, that ſome advocates for chriſtianity are

not

not perfectly aware "what ſpirit they are "of." It is not a Chriſtian ſpirit. In ſome reſpects, perhaps, it is better.

## SECTION III.

### *Of Objectionable Matter inſeparable from the Chriſtian Faith.*

WHILE the generality of chriſtians have believed, or affected to believe, that the canonical books of ſcripture were written by men divinely inſpired for that purpoſe, certain ſpeculative and philoſophical perſons admitting the truth both of the old Revelation and the new, have nevertheleſs thought the greateſt part of ſcripture to have been written without inſpiration, becauſe it was unneceſſary; and they have likewiſe thought many things contained in the ſcriptural books to be, on ſeveral accounts, highly objectionable. Some of

theſe matters they have explained away, and others they have rejected.

I do not mean to aſſert, that a man may not reject much ſcriptural matter (and much there is) which muſt be extremely offenſive to a religious perſon who has not renounced his underſtanding, and ſtill be a conſiſtent believer in both Revelations; but, in my apprehenſion, there are ſome things of this kind which are inſeparable from the proper chriſtian faith. And as that which cannot be well diſputed, I ſhall mention the doctrine of Chriſt himſelf recorded by the evangeliſts.

I know there are ſome chriſtians who contend for the *fallibility* of their Maſter: but I doubt much whether he would have admitted ſuch men as his diſciples if, when he was living, he had met with any ſuch candidates for diſcipleſhip. Should the reader think otherwiſe, let him carefully

attend to the character assumed by Jesus Christ, and the style in which he delivered himself. From the latter, perhaps, his pretensions may be more certainly learned than from the expressions which, when speaking of himself, he has chosen to adopt. Though he sometimes, indeed very rarely, condescends to *reason* with his audience, the general strain of his lectures is a strain of high authority. This is their characteristic distinction. Again and again the remarkable phraseology occurs "Verily, "verily *I say* unto you, &c." Considering this in connection with such passages as the following, in which he announces himself, we can neither be much at a loss concerning his lofty pretensions, nor how he would have borne to hear them questioned. These, we are told, are his expressions: "He whom God hath sent speaketh the "*words of God:* for God giveth not the "spirit by measure to him*." "He that

* John, 3d chapter, 34th verse.

"loveth

"loveth me not keepeth not my *ſayings:*
"and the word which you hear is not
"*mine*, but the *Father's* who ſent me*."
"Verily, verily I ſay unto you, the Son
"can do nothing of himſelf but what he
"ſeeth the Father do: for what things
"ſoever he doth, theſe alſo doth the Son
"likewiſe. For the Father loveth the Son,
"and *ſheweth him all things* which himſelf
"doth, &c.†" "Of that day and that
"hour knoweth no man, no, not the an-
"gels which are in heaven, *neither the Son,*
"but the Father‡." "All things are
"delivered unto me of my Father; and no
"man knoweth the Son but the Father:
"neither knoweth any man the Father
"ſave the Son, and he to whomſoever
"the Son will reveal him§." This is

* John, 14th chap. 24th verſe. † John, 5th chap.

‡ Mark, 13th chapter. This, indeed, does not agree very well with the preceding quotation: but that is not my affair.

§ Matthew, 11th chapter.

certainly very extraordinary language, and ſuch as, I believe, never fell from the lips of any other human being.

Now the grand doctrine, in the eſtimation of philoſophical chriſtians, which this ſingular Teacher delivered, is the doctrine of a future life of *happineſs* for good, and *miſery* for bad men. But if they believe this doctrine upon the authority of Chriſt, it appears to me they muſt, if conſiſtent, believe, likewiſe, upon the ſame authority, that the bad men (who, we are told by the ſame authority, compoſe the great maſs of mankind) are to be conſigned to *durable* and *final*, if not to everlaſting miſery *; which, conſequently, muſt have been the fate always intended for them by their

* This is confeſſed to be the doctrine of *Chriſt* by ſome chriſtians who diſcover, or think they diſcover, in the writings of *Paul*, the doctrine of ultimate virtuous happineſs for *all men*.—See pp. 93 and 94.

Maker,

Maker, intended even in the moment of their creation.

The above is adduced as a ſtriking inſtance of objectionable matter inſeparable from the belief of a conſiſtent chriſtian; though, in my own opinion, it is very far from being the only inſtance, and it is poſſible that, in this reſpect, the reader may think with me.

## SECTION IV.

### *Of the Inſufficiency of the Argument from Teſtimony.*

THE argument in proof of the chriſtian Revelation derived from teſtimony is eſteemed the principal argument, and, by very reſpectable men, conſidered as irrefragable. I apprehend it will be fairly ſtated thus:

Becauſe the firſt chriſtians profeſſed their confident belief in the truth of the chriſ-

tian miracles, and becauſe, under the influence of that belief, they acted and ſuffered and even ſacrificed their lives—it is inferred that therefore the chriſtian miracles were real; and from their reality the truth of the chriſtian revelation is inferred.

In oppoſition to this may be put the ignorance of the *age*, relative to the ſubject under conſideration, and particularly of the *people* in the firſt place concerned. To the jews, a miracle ſeems to have been nothing very *extraordinary:* and, with the more enlightened part of mankind, prodigies ſeem not at all to have been inadmiſſible. The philoſophical and ſcrutinizing ſpirit of modern times did not exiſt. And when it has been ſaid, with triumph, that Julian, (who, indeed, lived ſome centuries after Chriſt) although the accompliſhed and the determined enemy of chriſtianity, did not *deny* the reality of the chriſtian miracles, it ſeems to have been forgotten

that,

that, with all his accompliſhments and great abilities, Julian was *remarkable* as a believer in prodigies and miracles.

Further, whereas it has been aſſerted that, on ſuppoſition the chriſtian miracles were not real, the ſtate of mind and conduct of the firſt chriſtians had no adequate natural cauſe, and therefore were greater miracles than any mentioned in the New Teſtament:—now they muſt, indeed, be admitted to have been miracles if the aſſertion be true: but that cannot be admitted, ſince it does not follow that there was no adequate natural cauſe, becauſe we are unable to diſcover any. A ſincere and cordial *belief*, in whatever way generated, was quite ſufficient to produce the conduct of the perſons in queſtion. How far weak, and ignorant, and ſuperſtitious men, who are yet honeſt and upright, may be *impoſed on*, I will not undertake to ſay: but it muſt be granted that ſuch men are *liable* to im-

poſition: and, I think, it will not be denied that men of a ſuperior character, amiable PHILANTHROPISTS, prompted by generous ſentiments, and aſpiring to become the BENEFACTORS of their ſpecies, *may* be induced to *impoſe both on others and on themſelves.* This leads me to ſuggeſt to philoſophical unitarians, who believe Jeſus Chriſt to have been merely *a human being*, that it may be worth while for them to reconſider the very ſtriking and abſolutely *ſingular* ſtyle uſed by that extraordinary perſonage when ſpeaking of himſelf.

With reſpect to the opinion, that the jews were familar with the idea of a miracle, it is derived from the evangelical hiſtory. John ſays, that the brethren of Chriſt did not believe in him, though they were no ſtrangers to the works which he performed; for they adviſed him to render himſelf more conſpicuous thereby, and ſhew

imſelf to the world *. The ſame writer eclares, that though Chriſt had done *ſo many* miracles before them (the jewiſh peole) yet they believed not on him †.— Now, if we reflect on the nature of a miacle, we muſt ſee that it cannot fail to xcite the utmoſt aſtoniſhment in thoſe reſent at it, unleſs they be familiarized to uch things: or unleſs the Supreme Being, as the hiſtorian would have us believe) at he ſame time that he, by his prophet, works miracles, blinds the eyes of the perons in whoſe preſence they are wrought, nd hardens their hearts, ſo that the miracles cannot produce their effect.

That the jews did not think a miracle o be a very ſtrange thing, ſeems evident, likewiſe, from the ſtory which John relates t the beginning of his 5th chapter:— "There is (ſaith he) at Jeruſalem, by the "ſheep-market, a pool, which is called in

* John, 7th chapter. † John, 12th chapter.

"the

" the Hebrew tongue, Bethesda, having " five porches. In these lay a great mul- " titude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, " withered, waiting for the moving of " the water. For an angel went down, " at a certain season, into the pool, and " troubled the water. Whosoever, then, " first after the troubling of the water step- " ped in, was made whole of whatsoever " disease he had *." On this story it is

* A philosophical clergyman, on a certain occasion, declared to me, that he should as soon believe a Persian tale as this extraordinary narrative. The history of the Devil's temptation of Christ in the wilderness † seems, however, to bear more resemblance to a Persian tale. Now, I would observe that, whatever *absurdity* an unprejudiced reader may find in these two stories, they are both related with the same *simplicity* as that whereby the writings of the evangelists are generally distinguished. Simplicity of style, it is therefore presumed, does not necessarily imply truth. Nevertheless, it is well known how much stress has been laid on the simple style of the evangelical histories.

† See Apendix, No. 1.

obvious

obvious to remark, that the hiſtorian relates it as he would the ſtory of any ordinary occurrence: and, wonderful as the events related muſt have been, if real, we do not learn from him that they produced any emotion in the byſtanders, or even attracted at all the attention of the inhabitants of Jeruſalem. At London, I preſume, if ſuch things were to happen, the effect would be ſomewhat different.

The *dæmoniacal poſſeſſions*, too, ſuppoſed to occur ſo frequently among this ſuperſtitious people, and of which we read ſo much in the evangelical hiſtories, were conſidered by them as *miraculous*; equally ſo as the *means* whereby the dæmons were thought to be expelled: and Chriſt himſelf appears to have admitted that various other men, as well as himſelf, were in the habit of performing miraculous expulſions. "If *I* (ſaith he) by Beelzebub caſt out de-

"vils,

"vils, by whom do your *children* caſt them "out*?"

From

* Not being able to digeſt the doctrine of Chriſt and the evangeliſts upon this ſubject, ſome philoſophical chriſtians have taken the liberty to repreſent both their *maſter* and his immediate *diſciples* as ignorant believers in the popular ſuperſtition; while others have thought it more for their maſter's honour, to ſuppoſe him perfectly aware that there was no diabolical agency in theſe caſes; but that, not eſteeming it neceſſary to remove the falſe notions of them, entertained even by his own diſciples, he *connived at their deluſion*. If, however, he really knew better, he ſeems to have not merely connived; he ſeems to have done *more*, when he affected to hold converſation with the evil ſpirits, and likewiſe to authorize certain of them, on their expulſion, to take poſſeſſion of a herd of ſwine. Nevertheleſs, that Chriſt himſelf was, in this reſpect, as ignorant as other jews, no ingenuous perſon, probably, would doubt, who ſhould derive his opinion from the evangeliſts, and not from the above-mentioned philoſophers. But ſhould any one judge that Chriſt was ſo ignorant and ſuperſtitious as to believe that, which was indeed nothing

From hence we are naturally led to ɔnſider the Reply to an Objection urged ɣ certain unbelievers. They have obcted that, if the miracles which the New 'eſtament ſpeaks of as wrought in proof f chriſtianity were *real miracles*, the whole wiſh nation muſt have been converted; ɜ the evidence muſt have been irreſtible. To this ſome have replied, that ıe jews were induced to reject the vidence by ſuppoſing the miracles to ave been effected by the magical uſe of ıe *divine name*. This reply, if juſt and 'ell-founded, ſufficiently ſtamps the chaacter of the people: and, I think, a ſmile ıay be pardoned, if, from the authors of ıch a reply, we ſhould happen to hear of

ıing more than a natural diſeaſe, to be the effect f diabolical agency, I entreat that man to conder how well ſuch ignorance and ſuperſtition gree with the claims of this amiable and dignied enthuſiaſt to that immeaſurable knowledge 'hich he declared had been communicated to him ɣ the Supreme Being.

jews

jews being diſpoſed to *ſcrutinize* miracles. Superſtition ſeems much better calculated to make men *believers* than to make them *ſcrutinizers*. And, though we admit that the Hebrew chriſtians had a ſtrong intereſt to examine carefully, it ſeems not very reaſonable to judge that this intereſt would have the ſame effect upon a ſuperſtitious jew as upon an enlightened modern European in circumſtances otherwiſe ſimilar. And who of the jewiſh nation was free from ſuperſtition if, as is probable, Chriſt himſelf was not? The ſame *external* circumſtances do not affect all men in the ſame manner. To ſuppoſe they do, is a groſs fallacy.

The jews, it is likely, often imagined they ſaw miracles where none exiſted. But the *antecedent improbability* of miracles and revelation muſt, I ſhould think, to a philoſopher, be an objection againſt them almoſt, if not, altogether inſurmountable.

Granting

Granting it, however, poſſible that miracles may have been wrought in order to accompliſh ſome grand deſign not otherwiſe to be accompliſhed even by the *All-wiſe* and the *Almighty*, it is natural to inquire, Has any ſuch matter been effected by the chriſtian miracles?—The great object of chriſtianity, as its advocates declare, was the *reformation of the world.* Allowing then that it was worth while to *diſturb the order of nature* for ſo excellent a purpoſe, Has the world been reformed? The boldeſt chriſtian advocate will not, I believe, aſſert ſo much. Seriouſly, I have no idea of any thing more extravagant than the aſſertion would be. Yet let us ſuppoſe (what cannot be thought too little) that, out of the immenſe population of this globe, during a period of near eighteen centuries, ſome *millions* have become virtuous chriſtians;—what proportion do they bear to the innumerable multitude of individuals who have compoſed the gene-

rations

rations of mankind which, during the ſame period, have ſucceſſively tenanted the earth? Let us alſo ſuppoſe that chriſtianity has contributed towards the melioration of human affairs. Still, how far the effect is to be aſcribed to *it ſimply*, and how far to a liberal and benevolent *philoſophy*, will not be eaſily ſettled. In the mean time, I conſider myſelf as completely juſtified in affirming, if chriſtianity were a ſcheme for reforming the world, *that it has moſt egregiouſly failed.*

How it may appear to others I cannot tell, but it does not ſeem to me very credible, admitting the poſſibility of miracles, that ſuch an unfortunate ſcheme ſhould have originated from, and have been ſupported by, the *miraculous interference* of the Deity: and to an unprejudiced perſon, I ſuſpect, it will not be very ſatisfactory, as a ſolution of the difficulty, to hear "That "the reformation is going on, and, in due "time, will be happily perfected."

But

But, as the world has not been reformed by the chriſtian religion, ſhould we inquire what that religion has actually done for mankind, it will appear, that in giving occaſion to *wars* and *perſecutions* the moſt bloody and rancorous, it has produced a very great quantity of *evil*. Of this there can be no doubt; and, while this cannot be denied, it is foreign to the queſtion to talk, as ſome do, of its genuine moral tendency (be that ever ſo admirable), becauſe we are inquiring about matter of fact. With regard to the *good* which has taken place ſince the commencement of the chriſtian æra, part of it at leaſt, probably a large proportion, muſt be attributed to the *general diffuſion of knowledge*. We are pretty well informed what was the condition of chriſtendom during the middle ages, as they are termed. Since the revival of learning, there has been a progreſſive improvement, though not regularly progreſſive. Yet it well deſerves notice,

that, ſince chriſtianity has prevailed, there has exiſted in the world an evil greater than any that was ever experienced before that religion was known:—I mean the African ſlave trade, carried on by people calling themſelves *chriſtians*. It will be obſerved, I do not ſay that this horrid traffic has been *authorized*, and it is not needful for me to prove that it has not been *prevented*, by chriſtianity.

I do not, however, profeſs, nor ever have profeſſed, myſelf qualified to explain ſufficiently the conduct of the firſt chriſtians: but I find myſelf in a ſituation where it is neceſſary to chooſe between two difficulties; and therefore I chooſe the leaſt. I muſt either admit that the firſt chriſtians were *under a deluſion*, or that the *all-wiſe* Author of the univerſe has diſturbed the order of nature for the accompliſhment of what has not been accompliſhed; when, had it been his purpoſe to reform the world (as chriſ-

tians

tians aſſert), he could have effected that purpoſe by the *operation of natural cauſes**, without having recourſe to *miracles*; which, conſequently, were ſuperfluous and unneceſſary. The laſt part of the alternative is, indeed, ſomething more than a *difficulty*; it is an *impoſſibility*; which, I am ſatisfied, cannot be truly affirmed of the other, however extraordinary it may appear: and, were we in poſſeſſion of the *whole truth*, every thing would, I believe, appear very natural.

"Nature well known, no *prodigies* remain."

---

It is hoped the Apology contained in the foregoing pages, will be ſufficient to ſhew that perſons may be induced to become unbelievers in revealed religion by better motives than thoſe which have been imputed to ſuch perſons by ſome, from

* I muſt requeſt the reader to turn back to pp. 59 and 60.

whom they might have expected different treatment*.

A love of truth, a diſlike of impoſition, and a deſire of emancipation from unworthy and illiberal prejudices—theſe are principles † which influence the minds of ingenuous men in their inquiries: and one would be apt to think ſuch men would not find it difficult to conceive that others might be governed by the ſame principles, though their inquiries ſhould not terminate in the ſame manner as their own.

* With reſpect to myſelf, I think it right to ſay here that I have been treated with great liberality by a philoſophical chriſtian, who has done me the honour to correſpond with me on the ſubject of theſe papers.

† Though theſe are, in my eſtimation, virtuous principles, and the pledges of further virtue in the character where they are found, they have been repreſented (how juſtly let the reader determine) as exiſting where there is but little virtue.

A dif-

different termination ſeems, however, have given offence. Yet ſurely no one, his reputation or his merits what they ıy, is authorized, after having determin- for himſelf, to preſcribe the limit for ıer men, and iſſue out his prohibition, Thus far ſhall ye go, and no further."

# APPENDIX,

## No. I.

WHEN animadverting upon certain ſtrange facts related of the prophets Iſaiah, Ezekiel, and Hoſea, I had occaſion to mention Mr. Farmer's convenient method of ſolving ſuch difficulties, by conſidering them as merely *viſionary*. That method appeared ſo convenient to him, that he has been induced to convert what the writers of the Goſpel Hiſtory have evidently delivered as *matters of fact*, really and truly performed, into *prophetic viſions*. I refer to his interpretation of the ſeveral narratives of Chriſt's temptation in the wilderneſs. This interpretation is principally founded on the phraſeology uſed, where it is ſaid, that Chriſt was *led by the Spirit*, and *driven by the*

*Spirit*, into the wilderneſs to be tempte by the devil. Mr. F. ſuppoſes theſe ex preſſions equivalent to thoſe uſed to de note the ſupernatural operation which was thought to produce viſions in the minds of the prophets of the Old Teſtament. The books, however, where the accounts of theſe viſions occur, are profeſſedly books treating of *viſionary matters*. And yet, even in theſe books, ſhould certain things be related as having really taken place, *without any intimation* of their having been *tranſacted in viſion merely*,—to ſuppoſe this, ſeems to be doing ſomething very like *violence*. But to make the ſame ſuppoſition reſpecting a narrative given as a relation of facts which had really happened, by any writer profeſſing himſelf to be a hiſtorian of real tranſactions,—is ſurely *violence in the extreme*.

To juſtify his own interpretation, Mr. F. further, inſiſts much on the impropriety of

of conceiving the writers in queſtion to mean that Chriſt was actually led by the Spirit into the wilderneſs, becauſe he was in the wilderneſs *already*. It was in the Jordan, however, where we are given to underſtand that he was baptized by John: and the region bordering on the eaſtern bank of that river could not be abſolutely a *deſart*, ſince it was an inhabited country, though not very populous. But, from Mark's account, it appears that Chriſt, when in the wilderneſs, was *among the wild beaſts*; which circumſtance ſeems to be mentioned as an aggravation of his trial. It is, therefore, moſt natural to underſtand theſe writers as meaning to ſay, that Chriſt was led eaſtward into the country which was, indeed, *a deſart without inhabitants*.

Mr. F. nevertheleſs, will have it that theſe writers intended to inform us not that Chriſt was led into *the* wilderneſs, but

Mr. F.'s zeal in behalf of his new hypotheſis was very great, which we need not wonder at; but it ſeems to have been ſomewhat extravagant when it drew from him the following language: "The text itſelf "(on the letter of which the common hy-"pothefis reſts as its ſole foundation) in-"ſtead of poſitively and expreſsly aſſert-"ing, that the temptation of Chriſt was a "real outward tranſaction, contains clear "intimations, and even *direct aſſertions*, of "the very contrary *."

If ſo, can any thing be more wonderful than that, till Mr. F. aroſe, theſe *direct aſſertions* were *never underſtood* by men the moſt learned and intelligent†?"

But

* Inquiry, pp. 40, 41.

† This is barely within the limits of *poſſibility*. Thoſe learned men (Dr. S. Clarke, the great Le Clerc, and others mentioned by Mr. F.) would never, I am perſuaded, have admitted Mr. F.'s conſtruction of the phraſes in queſtion, conſider-

ing

But the new hypotheſis was thought
*nvenient*, as being not liable to the objec-
ons which, in Mr. F.'s opinion, might be
ſtly made to the old one. The *chief*
jections are, that the common hypo-
eſis is very diſhonourable to Chriſt.
hat it aſcribes to the devil the perform-
ice of the greateſt miracles. That it
cribes to the devil the performance of
ings not only preternatural, but abſurd
nd impoſſible.

Mr. F. has ſaid much to illuſtrate and
nforce his objections: but it is unneceſſary
r me to tranſcribe it all. That, how-
ver, which is to my purpoſe, I ſhall pro-
luce (viz.) what he has urged to ſhew
he *diſhonour brought upon Chriſt* by the

g *where and how they occur*: unleſs they, too,
ad been faſcinated by the *conveniency* of it. To me
appears a far-fetched conſtruction, laboured and
ver-ſtrained, and what even Mr. F. himſelf would
not have thought of but for a particular purpoſe.

common

common explication. " Scarce (ſaith he)
" can we preſerve upon our minds a ſuffi-
" cient reverence of the ſanctity and dig-
" nity of the Redeemer, when we behold
" him in ſuch familiar conference with, and
" under the power of, an unclean ſpirit,
" who at pleaſure tranſports his ſovereign
" and his judge from place to place, raiſes
" him to the moſt conſpicuous ſtations to
" expoſe him to public deriſion, and wan-
" tonly and arrogantly propounds to him
" one fooliſh enterprize after another. It
" fills us with horror, as well as aſtoniſh-
" ment, to conſider farther that, during all
" this tranſaction, Chriſt muſt have yield-
" ed voluntarily to the mere motion and
" inſtigation of the devil. For, though
" it was by the ſpirit of God that he was
" carried into the wilderneſs, yet it was by
" the devil that he was conveyed from
" thence to the temple, and placed upon
" its battlements; a moſt dangerous and
" formidable eminence! And, therefore,

" as the devil could have no power over " our Lord, unleſs by his free conſent, " Chriſt muſt have been acceſſary to his " own diſhonour, danger, and tempta- " tion*."

I ſhall now produce what Mr. F. has advanced with a view to convince us that the repreſentations of a viſion may ſerve equally as well as the objects of ſenſe for the trial, diſplay, and improvement of virtue. But unfortunately in this attempt he has, if I miſtake not, ruined his grand ſcheme.

Mr. F. aſſerts, that " what is imaginary " no way differs, in appearance, from that " which is real, and has the ſame effect " upon the prophet; who does not, at the " time, diſtinguiſh between the images of " a viſion and outward objects. If the " mind (he ſays) be paſſive, as no doubt " it is, in receiving theſe images, and can-

* Inquiry, pp. 14, 15, 16.

" not

" not but judge according to appearances;
" let it be remembered that juſt thus it is
" with regard to the impreſſion made by
" external objects themſelves, and the
" ideas they raiſe in the mind; the will
" having no more power to controul our
" inward views and apprehenſions, in this
" latter caſe, than in the former. And as,
" in both caſes, the mind is alike paſſive
" in receiving impreſſions, ſo, in all other
" reſpects, it may enjoy an equal liberty
" in both. Whether the notice of things
" is conveyed to it by the inſtrumentality
" of the ſenſes, or by a miraculous agency,
" it may experience the ſame diſpoſition
" and ſentiments with regard to the things
" themſelves. It may be as capable of a
" right determination and choice, with re-
" ſpect to the repreſentations of a viſion, as
" with reſpect to the objects of ſenſe."

Now, from the above account of the ſtate of a perſon's mind, whilſt experiencing

ing a viſion, it appears we have Mr. F.'s own authority to judge, that Chriſt, during his ſuppoſed viſion, though paſſive in *receiving the impreſſions*, was, *in all other reſpects*, at liberty; that he muſt have felt the ſame *diſpoſitions* and *ſentiments*, reſpecting the images impreſſed, as he would have done if the real objects, which they repreſented, had been preſent to him; and that he was equally capable of a *right determination* and *choice* as at any other time.

Mr. F. himſelf, therefore, has authorized us to conclude that, though Chriſt could not, if he would, conceive of his ſituation, otherwiſe than as *a wilderneſs*, and though he could not, if he would, avoid conſidering himſelf *in company with the devil*, he was, nevertheleſs, at liberty to *expreſs his abhorrence* of ſuch ſociety, and to *determine* whether or no he would hold conference with that evil ſpirit. A familiar conference, however, took place; from which it

appears, that Chriſt knew with whom he was converſing, as he called him by his name: and, notwithſtanding the whole tranſaction be ſuppoſed a viſion only, the character of Chriſt muſt, inevitably, be affected juſt as if it had been all a reality. Moreover, when he imagined himſelf conveyed through the air to the battlements of the temple, and likewiſe to the top of the mountain, he muſt have been conſcious, I think, of giving his voluntary conſent *. How much ſoever, therefore, Mr. F.'s religious feelings were ſhocked by the common interpretation, he would derive no juſt relief from his new hypotheſis; which leaves the objection, reſpecting the diſhonour of Chriſt, in full force.

Neither is the objection concerning ab-

* Even if it were admitted that, in conceiving of theſe tranſportations, he was ſubject to the overruling miraculous influence, it is utterly impoſſible that the *familiar converſation* ſhould have been other than *voluntary*.

ſurdities

ſurdities and impoſſibilities hereby removed: though, indeed, they are no longer aſcribed to the devil. But abſurdity or impoſſibility is no more the object of divine than of diabolical power.

After all, I believe, we muſt be content to take the evangelical narratives of the temptation in their plain literal meaning, as I doubt not the writers of them intended we ſhould. The uſe, however, which I ſhall make of them is, to infer from them the propriety of conſidering well how much credit is due to *accounts of miracles* given by writers who were capable of preſenting us with *ſuch a ſtory*.

# APPENDIX,

## No. II.

In the year 1792, a pamphlet was publiſhed, entitled, *Remarks on Mr. Gilbert Wakefield's Inquiry into the Expediency and Propriety of Public and Social Worſhip.* It was publiſhed without a name; but I believe it was univerſally aſcribed to a lady, whoſe literary merit has obtained for her a large portion of celebrity; and that it was juſtly aſcribed to her, there ſeems to be good internal evidence. Near the concluſion of this pamphlet the reader will find what I ſhall here tranſcribe. After conceding to Mr. W. that a *reform* in the public worſhip was to be wiſhed for, and after ſuggeſting ſome articles which ſhe ſpeaks of as hints offered with diffidence and reſpect, the eloquent writer proceeds

as

as follows: "Above all, it would be "deſirable to ſeparate from religion that "idea of gloom, which, in this country, "has but too generally accompanied it. "The fact cannot be denied; the cauſe "muſt be ſought partly in our natural "character, which, I am afraid, is not ei- "ther very cheerful or very ſocial, and "which we ſhall do well to meliorate by "every poſſible attention to our habits of "life;—and partly to the colour of our "religious ſyſtems. No one who embraces "the common idea of *future torments*, to- "gether with the doctrine of *election* and "*reprobation*, the inſufficiency of virtue to "eſcape the *wrath* of God, and the ſtrange "abſurdity which, it ſhould ſeem through "ſimilarity of ſound alone, has been ad- "mitted as an axiom, that ſins committed "againſt an Infinite Being do, therefore, "deſerve infinite puniſhment—no one, "I will venture to aſſert, can believe ſuch "tenets, and have them often in his

" with the metaphyſical idea of eternity,
" arranged in ſpecific propoſitions, fixed
" in creeds, and elaborated into ſyſtems,
" till at length they have been ſublimed
" into all the tremendous horrors of the
" Calviniſtic faith. Theſe doctrines, it
" is true, among thinking people, are
" loſing ground; but there is ſtill appar-
" ent, in that claſs called ſerious chriſ-
" tians, a tenderneſs in expoſing them;
" a ſort of leaning towards them, as, in
" walking over a precipice, one ſhould
" lean to the ſafeſt ſide; an idea that they
" are, if not true, at leaſt good to be be-
" lieved; and that a ſalutary error is better
" than a dangerous truth. *But that error*
" *can neither be ſalutary nor harmleſs which*
" *attributes to the Deity injuſtice and cruelty;*
" *and that religion muſt have the worſt of*
" *tendencies, which renders it dangerous for*
" *a man to imitate the being whom he wor-*
" *ſhips.* Let thoſe who hold ſuch tenets
" conſider that the inviſible Creator has
" no

"no name, and is identified only by his "*character*; and they will tremble to "think *what* being they are worſhipping, "when they invoke a power capable of "*producing exiſtence in order to continue it in* "*never-ending torments.* The God of the "Aſſembly's Catechiſm is not the *ſame* "God with the Deity of Thomſon's Sea-"ſons, and of Hutcheſon's Ethics *."

Having preſented the reader with this long and intereſting quotation, I ſhall take

* In the 25th chapter of Matthew, the *God of the chriſtians* is repreſented as, after a long ſucceſſion of ages, conducting the affairs of the human race to a grand conſummation: and at the end of Thomſon's Winter, he, too, has preſented us with the termination of this world's eventful and myſterious ſcenes; which laſt moſt intereſting event he has likewiſe aſcribed to the *Divinity whom he worſhipped.* The admired writer, from whom the above extract is taken, is requeſted to compare theſe two repreſentations, and ſee how much reſemblance ſhe can find.

the liberty to obſerve, what, in my apprehenſion, is generally the caſe, that well-diſpoſed chriſtians ſit down to read the *diſcourſes of Chriſt* with an *unconſcious predetermination* to find in them *nothing but what is good.* How ſhould they contain any thing elſe? Was not Chriſt commiſſioned by heaven for the inſtruction of mankind; and, for that purpoſe, was he not furniſhed with that incomparable wiſdom which deſcendeth from above? And does not every pious chriſtian parent eſteem it his duty to impreſs the belief of this upon the minds of his infant offspring? That the mind of the remarker upon Mr. W. was thus impreſſed will not, I imagine, be queſtioned. But, if that had not been the caſe, ſhe would not have found even thoſe parts of the vulgar ſyſtem, which are moſt obnoxious to her, at all incompatible with the doctrine which Chriſt delivered. On the contrary, ſhe would have perceived that doctrine to have been the *genuine*

*ſource*

*ſource* from which ſome, at leaſt, of thoſe obnoxious tenets have ſprung; and would, therefore, have ſpared herſelf the trouble of propoſing her ingenious conjectures reſpecting their origin. Had ſhe read the *diſcourſes of Chriſt* as ſhe would thoſe of any other man, with a view to learn what they really contained, ſhe would, I think, have underſtood them as clearly holding out theſe dogmas.

That the many, the maſs of human beings, are *wicked.* That the *good* (comparatively at leaſt) are few. That it is the deſign of God to confer upon the latter, in a future ſtate, an everlaſting felicity; and to inflict upon the former the never-ending torments of hell; or, however, to conſign them to long and exquiſite miſery, the termination of which will be the period of their exiſtence.

No one ever pretended to ſay that Jeſus Chriſt

Chriſt repreſented the human race as under a *courſe of diſcipline*, which would eventually qualify them for a future ſtate of *ultimate virtue and happineſs*; though ſome, it is true, have imagined they found this, or a ſimilar repreſentation, in Paul's epiſtles. But, if Paul has any where really taught this doctrine, ſo worthy of the benevolent and univerſal Parent, how wonderful is it that the *apoſtle* ſhould have poſſeſſed the ſublime wiſdom which his *maſter* wanted! For, who was that maſter? A perſonage (if we admit his own account) ſo highly dignified, and of ſuch ſuperior excellence, that he *knew* all the counſels of the Deity, and was truly *known* by none but the Father, *i. e.* God himſelf. If the above doctrine, however, was really taught by the apoſtle, he has not only contradicted his maſter; he has contradicted himſelf, as will appear to any one who will give himſelf the trouble to read the paſſage quoted, page 69, of the preceding Apology.

If,

If, at ſome future moſt important period, agreeably to the doctrine of Chriſt, both good and bad men (the *few* and the *many*) ſhall be judged by their Maker, and their fates finally determined; it is impoſſible for Mrs. ——, or a perſon whoſe underſtanding is greatly inferior to hers, not to ſee that the Judge will *then do* what he *always intended.* Ignorant mortals may be wiſer to-morrow than to-day; and, therefore, their intentions may, to-morrow, be different from what they now are. Not ſo the intentions of the omniſcient Deity. But then, if the human race are to be diſpoſed of as Chriſt has informed us, the doctrines ſo revolting to Mrs. ——, the doctrines of *election* and *reprobation*, muſt inevitably be true.

Furthermore, it is worthy of ſerious conſideration, that the *ſpirit* of puniſhment, exhibited in the diſcourſes of Chriſt, is not that *philoſophical ſpirit* which has for its object

author of the remarks on Mr. W. induces me to expreſs my wiſhes that ſhe may, and

the powerful influence of prejudice, could induce him to think it favourable to the cauſe he is pleading. I think it quite the reverſe. His idea of the nature and deſign of *puniſhment*, in conformity with that of the wiſeſt and beſt legiſlators, is, indeed, moſt juſt. On the contrary, throughout the jewiſh and chriſtian ſcriptures, the Divinity is repreſented, when inflicting puniſhment, either as acting like a weak mortal, under the dominion of wrathful paſſion, who ſeeks to revenge himſelf for perſonal injury, or elſe (which is certainly more dignified) as executing, in a manner awful and ſolemn, the decrees of *Vindictive Juſtice*. If Mr. F. could bring himſelf to read the ſcriptures as writings which he had never yet ſeen, and in which he had no particular concern, he would find what I ſay to be true. But he comes *prepared* by the religious impreſſions made in his childhood, agreeably to the doctrine of *Aſſociation* which he has ſo well illuſtrated.

To me the ſcriptural doctrine of puniſhment brings its own evidence, that it is not from *God*, but from *men*; the wiſeſt of whom, whatever were

d hopes that ſhe will, do herſelf the juſ-
e, to inquire what is the *real doctrine* of
ſus Chriſt, eſpecially as it concerns the
HARACTER of the Supreme Being,
*th her mind at perfect liberty.*

re their pretenſions, had, unqueſtionably, much
learn.

As Mr. F. has ſuppoſed that *a very long period* of
ſery may be neceſſary, in a future ſtate, in or-
to exterminate the bad habits acquired by
:ked men in this, it is to be wiſhed he would
d the delightful and edifying account of the
ſon at Philadelphia by the Duke de la Roche-
ıcault Liancourt.

# APPENDIX,
## No. III.

MR. ANTHONY ROBINSON, at the concluſion of the ſecond edition of his *Hiſtory of the Perſecutions of Chriſtians, by Jews, Heathens, and Chriſtians* *, obſerves, very naturally, "Perhaps an inquiring reader will "aſk, if ſo various, ſo cruel, and ſo fatal "have been the perſecutions of chriſtians, "if chriſtianity have given occaſion to ſo "much ſuffering, if ſo many *human ſacri-* "*fices* have been offered up by chriſtians "to their God, is it upon the whole any "advantage to the world, that chriſtianity "has been preached amongſt mankind?— "This is a queſtion of great importance; "it will be in vain to reply that theſe evils "have ariſen from the *abuſe* of chriſtianity; "we muſt meet it in its full extent, and

* Publiſhed by Johnſon, 1794.

"argue

" argue the effect of chriſtianity, as it muſt
" have been foreſeen to [by] him who
" gave it for a bleſſing to mankind. This
" queſtion can only be determined by
" comparing the good with the evil which
" men have received, and which has at-
" tended the ſpread of chriſtianity. The
" evil conſiſts of the perſecutions which
" we have already given in detail; but the
" good is ſo great and various, that it is
" difficult fully to ſtate it. Men muſt
" have ſome powerful motive to induce
" them to attend to their duty, and the
" great *body of mankind* are incapable of
" being attached to their duty, either by
" *preſent intereſt*, or by *fame*. It is little
" their *labour* can produce, and they are
" too *obſcure* to excite public attention.
" Where intereſt and fame are alike impo-
" tent, religion is all-powerful. The gain
" and the loſs which this life preſents to
" them are eaſy of eſtimation, and inſuf-
" ficient to inſpire them with energy in
" action, or to prevent them from becom-

" In order to eſtabliſh the propoſition " which I have quoted (ſays Mr. R.), the " preacher ſtates that every man *ought* to " conſult his own ſelfiſh intereſt in all his " actions, and that no authority can oblige " him to forego any one perſonal indi- " vidual advantage, except in order to " obtain a greater advantage by that ſelf- " denial.

" Admitting that this reaſoning is true, " as far as it goes to the eſtabliſhment of " ſelf-intereſt as the foundation of moral " obligation, it is certainly not true, that " a man *does* regulate his conduct by any " motive of unſocial ſelf-intereſt; and " without this be proved, it will not fol- " low, that the excluſion of the hopes and " fears of a future world will deſtroy the " practical virtues of life. Morality is at- " tended by moſt powerful ſanctions in " this life, which preſs equally upon the " atheiſt, the theiſt, and the chriſtian, and

" of

" of which the firſt muſt feel the full force.
" Morality conſiſts ſimply in the diſcharge
" of the duties which flow from the rela-
" tions which ſubſiſt betwixt men. Man
" inſulated and alone is a being entirely
" helpleſs, and abſolutely wretched. So-
" ciety is the charm of his exiſtence, and
" the balm of his life. To enjoy this ſo-
" ciety, the individual muſt render himſelf
" agreeable to thoſe that ſurround him;
" and, in order to this, he muſt reſpect
" and promote their happineſs. This im-
" poſes upon him an attention to their
" wiſhes, a reſpect for their rights, and a
" dread of their violation. He inſtantly
" finds that an enlarged ſelf-love and ſo-
" cial are the ſame. Thus deeply rooted
" are the ſanctions of morality, and of uni-
" verſal operation; they are not the crea-
" tures of arbitrary inſtitution or accidental
" diſcovery; they are bottomed in the na-
" ture of human beings, and, wherever
" man is found connected with his fellow-
" man, their influence is felt.

" Theſe natural and eternal ſanctions " of virtue operate before *it is poſſible* to " convey to the minds of children religious " notions. The accommodations of in- " fancy itſelf, become the great teachers " of morals. Before the child knows, or " believes aught of heaven or hell, he " learns to ſacrifice preſent inclination to " procure the advantages of intercourſe " and love. It may be affirmed, with as " much truth, that the ſocial paſſions de- " pend for their exiſtence upon religious " belief, as that the antiſocial demand that " belief to counteract and reſtrain their " energies.

" The preacher's argument is very little " ſtrengthened by his obſervation (p. 12) " that *all reaſoning on morals ſuppoſes a* " *diſtinction between inclination and duties,* " *affection and rules.* For ſcarcely any " great object of human ambition can be " named, which does not require many " ſacrifices, and which is not oppoſed by

" many

" many inclinations of the individual who
" purſues it. Do we determine upon the
" acquiſition of fortune, how many plea-
" ſures muſt we deny ourſelves, and how
" many vexations muſt we encounter in
" the purſuit? Man is continually aſſailed
" by oppoſite intereſts and deſires. Some
" muſt be ſacrificed; their co-exiſtence
" and indulgence is impoſſible. In de-
" termining upon this ſacrifice, looks he
" to heaven or to hell? Ridiculous! He
" weighs the importance of each preſent
" object; and purſues that, which, in his
" eſtimation, is the moſt valuable.

" Morality is the reſult of ſelf-love and
" ſympathy, operating conſtantly on the
" mind, and forming the character under
" the influence of *preſent* objects, of which
" he will entertain no doubt who examines
" nature with the ſteady eye of the author
" of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments.* If
" any one queſtions whether preſent ob-
" jects

" jects afford a ſufficient motive for the " reſtraint of paſſion, and the correction " of deſire amidſt contending intereſts, I " beg him to obſerve the conduct of the " miſer, the lover, and the hero. I call " upon him to leave the field of conjecture, " and to examine the realities of life, and " then to tell me *how great* is the influ- " ence of *future hopes and fears.*

" It may, perhaps, be ſaid, that ſo ardent " a deſire after one object as is often diſ- " coverable in the miſer, the lover, or the " hero, can only exiſt in characters of pe- " culiar ſtrength, and that ſuch conſiſtency " in purſuit cannot be expected from com- " mon minds. This may be granted; " but muſt it not alſo be granted that a " future hope of poſſible good in a world " unknown, and of a nature unknown, re- " quires, in order to influence powerfully, " ſtill more extraordinary minds? Let " the preacher's theory be put to the teſt

" of

experience. If this proſpect of ſelf-
n intereſt, and individual remuneration
n a future life had any effect, as it is
nfinite and unbounded, reducing all
other intereſts to non-entity, it muſt an-
nihilate all vice, and *perfect* all character.
*Facts* ſhew us that mixed ſtate of things
which reſults from paſſion, *imperfectly*
reſtrained, and ſelfiſhneſs *imperfectly*
counteracted by the influence of reaſon
and feeling upon the ſocial advantages
of life; but they diſcover to us nothing
in corroboration of the theory of the
preacher, or the actual influence of his
future hopes and fears. It may, there-
fore, be fairly inferred, that whatever
human virtue is, it is by the operation
of the actual circumſtances of man, by
his preſent hopes and fears, and that a
change in the faith of a country, will
not effect the morality of it.

"The real ſtate of morals in different
countries

" countries ſtrongly enforces this obſerva-
" tion. In China there is no public re-
" ligion; and in various regions in the
" Eaſt, the doctrine of a future world is
" unknown. Many countries have un-
" dergone an entire revolution in their
" religious ſyſtem, and yet the ſtate of
" morals is the ſame. Indeed, giving an
" allowance for the different operation of
" climate and of the ſtate of civilization,
" upon the human conſtitution, there is
" little variety in the morality of different
" countries. In other reſpects, men, ſo-
" cial and dependent men, are every where
" the ſame; and, although profeſſing op-
" poſite religions, and ſome no religion at
" all, are eſſentially alike in moral con-
" duct.

" It is vain to allege the *proper* againſt
" the *actual* influence of the hopes and fears
" of men concerning their future exiſt-
" ence; theſe hopes and fears operate, if
" they

"they operate at all, upon *man*; a creature
"which we ought to ſtudy before we can
"know the kind of moral regimen ſuita-
"ble for him, or pronounce any thing
"concerning it. If then it be found, *in*
"*fact*, that future, diſtant, unknown, in-
"conceivable good, does not conſtitute
"a motive which influences this animal,
"in vain we may declaim for ever upon
"its power, as we may upon that of the
"magnet, which, although of great influ-
"ence upon certain bodies, attracts not
"common earth. The preacher aſks,
"(page 13) *What is there to reſtrain an*
"*atheiſt from the commiſſion of crime, when*
"*it flatters with the proſpect of impunity, and*
"*the certainty of immenſe advantage?* I
"anſwer, his ſympathies and his fear of
"ſelf-reproach. It is true, that this de-
"claimer thinks ſelf-reproach a folly,
"where detection can be avoided; but
"unleſs ſilenced by the ſophiſtry of ſuper-
"ſtition, ſelf-reproach will always accom-
"pany

" pany inhumanity of conduct; it flows " from the conſtitution of man, and is " abſolutely unavoidable.

" If the preacher think theſe ſympathies " too weak, and this fear too fooliſh to re- " ſtrain atheiſts from crime, I demand of " him to ſhew me, what is ſtrong where " theſe have been found weak? are the " hopes and fears of a future life?

" Anſwer, ye Conſtantines, ye Offas, " ye Richards, ye Henrys, ye religious " murderers of all ages and nations, did " theſe hopes and fears prevent you from " butchering your children, your wives, " your connexions? Let us not forget " the actual effect of theſe things. The " pinnacle of conjecture ſuits the religious " aſtronomer for his obſervations, he " thence deſcries new planets and calcu- " lates their motions; but the vale of rea- " lity becomes him who would lay down " the law for man."

Now,

Now, though I am not prepared to ſubſcribe to the whole of this *latter extract*, I think it contains important truth, ſhews the writer's ability, and affords very ſatiſfactory reaſon for judging that, of the quantity of *good* which has exiſted in the world during the laſt ſeventeen or eighteen centuries, a *much ſmaller proportion*, than is generally apprehended, ought to be attributed to the chriſtian religion. Let us take the advice of Mr. R. let us *examine the realities of life*, and we ſhall not remain long in doubt how bad men are deterred from crimes. They are not deterred by *future puniſhments*, but by the *law of the land.* What *religious* man, who believes moſt, would eſteem his life and property ſafe, if they were only protected by the *fear of hell?* The truth is, the horrible and everlaſting puniſhments of the chriſtian religion defeat their own purpoſe. They are not believed; they are perceived to be *inconſiſtent both with juſtice and*

*and mercy:* beſides that men in general will ever be (as nature intended they ſhould) influenced by objects *preſent*, whoſe power over their happineſs they have experienced, rather than by objects in a *diſtant and unknown world.* If, indeed, men did thoroughly believe that infinite happineſs or miſery did certainly await them in a future ſtate, they would be ſo *overwhelmed* by the conſideration, as to be altogether diſqualified for the offices of life. This, it ſhould ſeem, was the caſe of ſome, when there was *more faith* upon the earth. What opinion can one entertain of thoſe early chriſtians, who were ſo deſirous of the crown of martyrdom, and ſo earneſt to take poſſeſſion of eternal felicity, as to *obtrude* themſelves on their perſecutors, contrary, even, to their maſter's injunction? And, in later times, inſtances have not been wanting of *ſanguine* perſons frantic with unutterable joy, while others, of a *melancholy* complexion, have endured torments

torments similar to what are supposed to be the lot of the damned. But, at present, the number of *true, cordial, christian believers* is not great among the multitude professing christianity.

Nevertheless, whatever has been the *degree of faith actually existing* in the minds of certain men calling themselves christians, they have persecuted their fellow-christians, *even to death*, for not believing creeds dictated by the persecutors and by them styled orthodox; and these christian persecutors have represented such murder as a christian duty. This practice, moreover, has not been confined to one age, or even to one century: insomuch, that the annals of the church have been, with great propriety, termed, annals of blood.

The genuine spirit of christianity is, doubtless, a spirit of benevolence; and, assuredly, many christians in all ages have,

more or leſs, imbibed it: but it happens, unfortunately (as a little reflection will ſhew us), that our power to do hurt and injury greatly exceeds our power of doing good. A man who can do nothing elſe, may, in a moment, by a ſingle act (a murder ſuppoſe) do miſchief incalculable: while, in order to a good man's effecting any thing greatly and extenſively beneficial, many circumſtances muſt come in aid of his benevolence. Now chriſtianity has, *in fact*, ſupplied fuel to the worſt of human paſſions: and dreadfully far have the effects of chriſtian rancour and animoſity extended.

But the ſpirit of chriſtianity is alſo a ſpirit of ſlaviſh and implicit belief, hoſtile to intellectual improvement *.

Conſidering, then, that the *maſs* of mankind is little influenced by religious be-

* See Apology, pp. 107, 108, 109, 110, 111.

ief, conſidering that the *genuine influence of chriſtian belief* is, in ſome reſpects, *unfavourable to human happineſs*, conſidering that, though chriſtianity did not *authorize*, it has eventually *given occaſion to*, the moſt cruel and deſtructive wars, and likewiſe to ſyſtematical and ingenious tortures, inflicted by chriſtians on their chriſtian brethren —I own it appears to me very doubtful whether the quantity of *evil* reſulting from the chriſtian religion, be not *more than equal* to the quantity of *good* which it has produced.

To many reflecting perſons it ſeems improbable, in the higheſt degree, that the Author of Nature, who communicates his gifts to us by the operations of nature, agreeably to the eſtabliſhed laws of the univerſe, ſhould *break in* upon thoſe laws, by miraculous operations, in order to communicate good to us. And indeed, by philoſophical men, who are chriſtians,

experience? What has been the condition of mankind ſince the promulgation of chriſtianity? Since that happy era, have men become wiſe, and juſt, and benevolent? Are they, now, ſuch? And does every region of the earth exhibit the delightful ſcenes of virtuous happineſs?

It is to be expected, when an intelligent man propoſes to himſelf ſome great object, he will chooſe the *proper means* of attaining it. However, if human deſigns prove abortive, we are not greatly ſurpriſed. But, that Infinite Intelligence ſhould form a ſcheme for the benefit of the human race, that this ſcheme ſhould fail, and that Infinite Intelligence ſhould be diſappointed —this is, indeed, very aſtoniſhing. Nevertheleſs, we muſt believe it to be true, if we believe the truth of the chriſtian revelation; unleſs we believe the reformation of the world *never was the object* of that revelation. The Calviniſts, upon this

this head, ſeem more conſiſtent than ſome other chriſtians: they believe that the object of chriſtianity was not the *reformation of the world*, but the *ſalvation of God's elect*, which they believe will certainly be accompliſhed; for, ſay they (and they ſay well), the deſigns of the Omniſcient and the Almighty *can never prove abortive.*

# APPENDIX,

## No. IV.

In the preceding Apology, pp. 176 and 177, I have hinted at the *effects* produced by the *cordial belief* * of certain chriſtian doctrines. Of theſe effects the late William Cowper, Eſq. was an eminent and unfortunate inſtance. This gentleman, who poſſeſſed in a high degree the ſenſibility and imagination of a poet, had, it is ſaid, in the former part of his life, fallen into a courſe of diſſipation; from which, it ſhould ſeem, the impreſſions made on his mind by that ſpecies of religion denominated *calviniſtic methodiſm* †, reclaimed him. That his religion had

* People may amuſe themſelves in *talking* about any thing *without believing it.*

† Calviniſm and chriſtianity, as far as the doctrine of a *future ſtate* is concerned, ſeem to be in perfect agreement. See Apol. p. 157.

taken

taken ſtrong hold of him is evident from his writings. He has given the following account of himſelf in that admirable production entitled The TASK, pp. 96 and 97.

" I was a ſtricken deer that left the herd
" Long ſince; with many an arrow deep infixt
" My panting ſide was charged, when I withdrew
" To ſeek a tranquil death in diſtant ſhades.
" There was I found by one who had himſelf
" Been hurt by the archers. *In his ſide he bore,*
" *And in his hands and feet, the cruel ſcars.*
" With gentle force ſoliciting the darts,
" He drew them forth, and *healed*, and *bade me live.*"

After receiving (as he imagined) ſuch an ineſtimable benefit from the hands of Jeſus Chriſt, nothing could be more natural than that he ſhould thenceforth conſider himſelf as one of the happy *favourites* ſelected from the human race, and deſtined to enjoy for ever, in a future ſtate, the inconceivable bliſs promiſed in the chriſtian ſcriptures. Accordingly we find him, in the ſame poem, p. 146, where he is de-

ſcribing the employments of a winter's evening, mentioning himſelf and his friends as, among other things, giving their attention to

——————— " themes of a graver tone
" Exciting oft their gratitude and love,
" While they retraced with memory's pointing wand,
" That called the paſt to their exact review,
" The dangers they had ſcaped, the broken ſnare,
" The diſappointed *foe* *, deliverance found
" Unlooked for, life preſerved and peace reſtored;
" Fruits of *omnipotent eternal love*."

It appears, therefore, he flattered himſelf, that *omnipotent and eternal love* had deſignated, from everlaſting, him and his friends as its *favourite objects*. But this delightful dream was at an end long before his life: and was ſucceeded by another dream of a very different complection. He now conſidered himſelf as numbered with the vaſt multitude of *reprobates* foredoomed to ſuffer the moſt

* The Devil.

horrible

horrible miſery for ever and ever; and in this ſtate of mind he continued till his death.

One is particularly concerned at Mr. Cowper's fate, ſo good and excellent a man as he was known to be, and of ſuch uncommon qualifications. Some have ſuppoſed him deranged: but I believe he never ſuffered any other than a religious derangement. It is true, indeed, he had a diſpoſition to melancholy, not unuſual with Engliſhmen: on which account it is extraordinary that he ſhould ever have entertained ſuch confidence of his *heavenly election.* Few perſons of his caſt are able to arrive at that point. Thoſe who do ſo are generally *ſanguine people.* He had, I ſuſpect however, his elevations as well as his depreſſions.

Mr. Cowper's caſe is by no means ſingular, and would be abundantly more

frequent if men did *really believe* the doctrines of chriſtianity. Be that as it may, it is worth while perhaps to inquire into the *merits* of that faith, when a man preſerves ſuch a confidence as Mr. Cowper once poſſeſſed. Such a man is perſuaded that he and his chriſtian friends enjoy a *monopoly* of what is infinitely deſirable: whilſt, on every ſide, he contemplates his *brethren of mankind* as the *objects of divine wrath*, and deſtined, before they exiſted, to endure the eternal torments of hell. This dreadful appointment he conceives to reſult from the *will* of God: for, according to the apoſtle Paul, "He hath mercy on "whom he *will*, and whom he *will* he "hardeneth." Such a happy-confiding chriſtian believes, alſo, that God might, moſt righteouſly, have allotted *him* his portion with theſe miſerable wretches; and aſcribes his happier condition to the *diſtinguiſhing grace* of God. He thinks, therefore, that he can never be thankful enough,

enough, and, in the fervour of his gratitude, he will tell you that God is "the "Father of Mercies:" nay he will declare, that "God is LOVE." But a ſober by-ſtander might naturally aſk, whether it be *poſſible* for him to believe theſe his own declarations? It is probable, nevertheleſs, he will even go ſo far as to uſe theſe very expreſſions to God himſelf; that God, concerning whom he affirms that he determined from the beginning to *damn the whole human ſpecies*, except the few whom he ſelected, without any regard to their qualifications, to be the objects of his *ſpecial* and *diſtinguiſhing grace*.

The long, but very curious and intereſting paſſage which I ſhall here tranſcribe from the fore-mentioned poem, will afford a good ſpecimen of Mr. Cowper's writing, and likewiſe of his religious ſentiments:

" Sure there is need of ſocial intercourſe,
" Benevolence and peace and mutual aid
" Between the nations, in a world that ſeems
" To toll the death-bell of its own deceaſe,
" And, by the voice of all its elements,
" To preach the general doom. When were the winds
" Let ſlip with ſuch a warrant to deſtroy * ?
" When did the waves ſo haughtily o'erleap
" Their ancient barriers, deluging the dry ?
" Fires from beneath and meteors † from above,
" Portentous, unexampled, unexplained,
" Have kindled beacons in the ſkies ; and th' old
" And crazy earth has had her ſhaking fits
" More frequent, and foregone her uſual reſt.
" Is it a time to wrangle, when the props
" And pillars of our planet ſeem to fail,
" And Nature ‡, with a dim and ſickly eye,
" To wait the cloſe of all ? But grant her end
" More diſtant, and that prophecy demands
" A longer reſpite, unaccompliſhed yet ;
" Still they are frowning ſignals, and beſpeak
" Diſpleaſure in his breaſt who ſmites the earth
" Or heals it, makes it languiſh or rejoice :
" And 'tis but ſeemly that where *all* deſerve

* Alluding to the late calamities in Jamaica, 1780.

† Aug. 18, 1783.

‡ Alluding to the fog that covered both Europe and Aſia during the whole ſummer of 1783.

" And

" And ſtand expoſed by common peccancy
" To what no *few* have felt, there ſhould be peace,
" And brethren in calamity ſhould love.

" Alas for Sicily! rude fragments now
" Lie ſcattered where the ſhapely column ſtood.
" Her palaces are duſt. In all her ſtreets
" The voice of ſinging and the ſprightly chord
" Are ſilent. Revelry and dance and ſong
" Suffer a ſyncope and ſolemn pauſe
" While God performs, upon the trembling ſtage
" Of his own works, his dreadful part alone.
" How does the earth receive him?—With what ſigns
" Of gratulation and delight, her king?
" Pours ſhe not all her choiceſt fruits abroad,
" Her ſweeteſt flowers, her aromatic gums
" Diſcloſing paradiſe where'er he treads?
" She quakes at his approach. Her hollow womb
" Conceiving thunders through a thouſand deeps
" And fiery caverns roars beneath his feet.
" The hills move lightly and the mountains ſmoke,
" For he has touched them. From th' extremeſt point
" Of elevation down into th' abyſs
" *His wrath is buſy and his frown is felt.*
" The rocks fall headlong and the vallies riſe;
" The rivers die into offenſive pools,
" And, charged with putrid verdure, breathe a groſs
" And mortal nuiſance into all the air.
" What ſolid was, by transformation ſtrange,
" Grows fluid; and the fixt and rooted earth,
" Tormented into billows, heaves and ſwells,

" Or,

" Or, with vortiginous and hideous whirl,
" Sucks down it's prey inſatiable. Immenſe
" The tumult and the overthrow, the pangs
" And agonies of human and of brute:
" Multitudes fugitive on every ſide,
" But fugitive in vain. The ſylvan ſcene
" Migrates uplifted, and, with all it's ſoil,
" Alighting in far diſtant fields, finds out
" A new poſſeſſor, and ſurvives the change.
" Ocean has caught the frenzy, and, upwrought
" To an enormous and o'erbearing height,
" Not by a mighty wind, but by that voice
" Which winds and waves obey, invades the ſhore
" Reſiſtleſs. Never ſuch a ſudden flood,
" Upridged ſo high and ſent on ſuch a charge,
" Poſſeſſed an inland ſcene. Where now the throng
" That preſſed the beach, and, haſty to depart,
" Looked to the ſea for ſafety? They are gone,
" Gone with the refluent wave into the deep,
" A prince with half his people."

A little further the poet tells us,

" Such evil hath ſin wrought, and ſuch *a flame*
" *Kindled in heaven that it burns down to earth,*
" *And, in the furious inqueſt that it makes*
" *On God's behalf, lays waſte his faireſt works.*
" The very elements, though each be meant
" The miniſter of man to ſerve his wants,
" Conſpire againſt him. With his breath he draws
" A plague into his blood, and cannot uſe

" Life's

" Life's neceſſary means but he muſt die.
" Storms riſe t' o'erwhelm him; or, if ſtormy winds
" Riſe not, the waters of the deep ſhall riſe,
" And needing none aſſiſtance from the ſtorm,
" Shall roll themſelves aſhore and reach him there,
" The earth ſhall ſhake him out of all his holds,
" Or make his houſe his grave: nor ſo content
" Shall counterfeit the motions of the flood
" And drown him in her dry and duſty gulfs*."

The very extraordinary matter contained in theſe quotations leads me to make the following remark. When the dreadful natural events occur which ſo afflict mankind, one ſhould think a good man, that worſhips a God whoſe attributes are *wiſdom* and *benevolence*, would be ſolicitous to reconcile ſuch events to thoſe venerable attributes: whereas Mr. Cowper has repreſented the object of his worſhip, when producing theſe awful phænomena, as inſtigated by *wrath* and *fury* to execute *vengeance*—on whom? On his own *creatures*, who have offended him.

* See Cowper's Poems Vol. II. pp. 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53.

he had proved, that God was the *Cauſe of all things*, and the creatures nothing more than his *inſtruments*. If, however, his prejudice had not hindered him, he muſt have perceived that, if this be true, then the Divine Being, whenever he has puniſhed mankind for their ſins, muſt have puniſhed them not for what *they* did, but for what *he did himſelf* by their *inſtrumentality*. If, moreover, he puniſhed them *not with any view to their benefit*, but to ſatisfy his wrath and vengeance* on creatures who were *nothing more than his inſtruments*;—what muſt be our idea of ſuch a Deity? An idea which I am unwilling to expreſs. But if ſuch a Deity there were (as happily there is not) we ſhould be conſtrained to think him not the *beſt*, but the *worſt* being in the univerſe.

Mr. Cowper ſeems not to have *taſted* merely, but to have *drank deep* of the

* Jeremiah ch. v. 9. God is repreſented as ſaying, "Shall not my ſoul be *avenged?*"

ſcriptural ſpring. He would otherwiſe never have been qualified to furniſh us with the above cited deſcription ſo exquiſitely horrible. Yet after all, with no better a religion, one is glad to find a man ſo truly good as Mr. Cowper undoubtedly was. However, it is but juſtice to acknowledge (retaining the metaphor) that the ſcripture is a fountain which ſends forth not *bitter* water only, but *ſweet*. From the *ſcripture* Mr. Cowper derived the ſhocking and blaſphemous repreſentation which he has given us of the Divinity, who is, likewiſe, *there* characterized as the *benevolent parent of the prodigal ſon*.

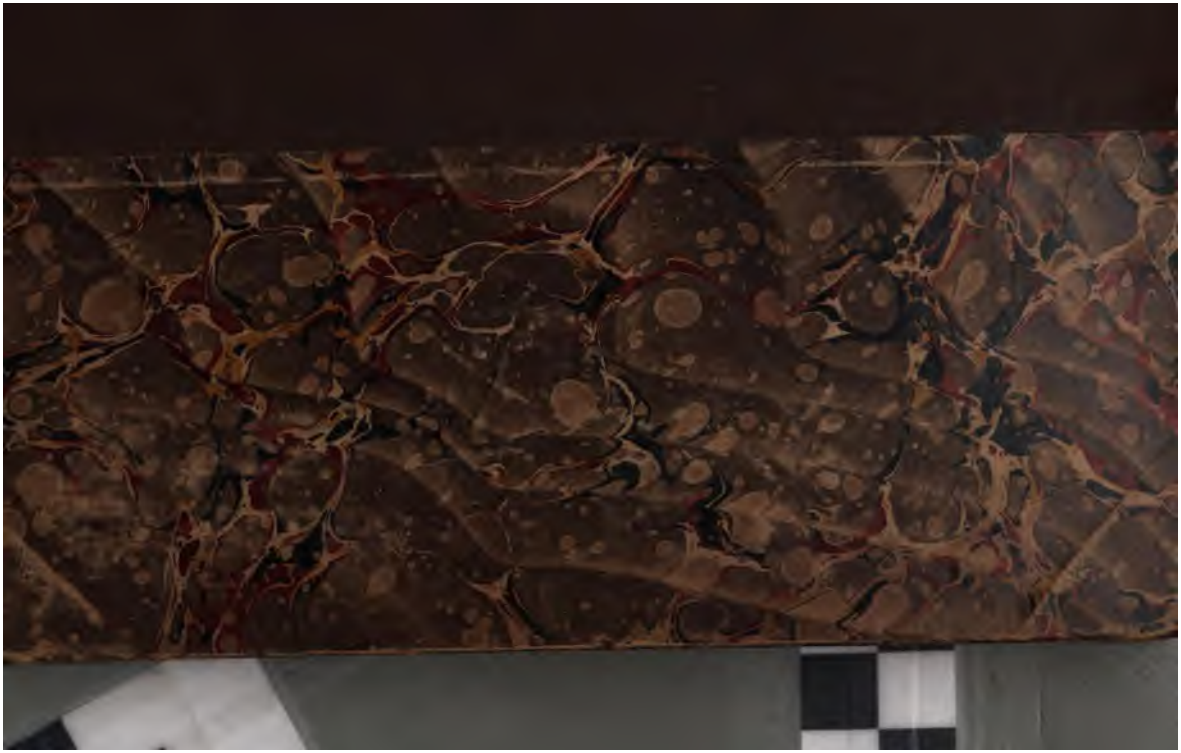
Nevertheleſs, if men do *indeed believe* a future ſtate of endleſs happineſs for the *elect*, and endleſs miſery for the *reprobates*, the conſideration is ſo very important and intereſting, that it cannot fail to *occupy their minds exceedingly*; and that conſideration muſt bring with it a character of Deity

very

*very different* from the character of a *benevolent parent.*

It is a remarkable fact that a philoſophical chriſtian, in a correſpondence with me upon the ſubject of Revelation, conceded not willingly I preſume) "That "the object of chriſtian worſhip had been "too generally a *malignant Deity.*" This gentleman, in common, I apprehend, with every *philoſophical theiſt*, is convinced agreeably to Mr. Cowper's doctrine, that there is in the univerſe *but one proper Cauſe of all things.* He believes however that that VENERABLE CAUSE, whatever *temporary calamities* may be admitted into the grand ſyſtem, operates, according to the dictates of eternal *wiſdom* and *benevolence*, not partially for the advantage of a few *favourites*, but for the benefit of the *whole creation:* thus taſting, as Thomſon expreſſes it,

"The joy of God, to ſee a HAPPY WORLD."

THE END.

T. Benſley, Printer, Bolt Court, Fleet Street, London.